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Introduction

The Gandhian Dialogic

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi has today become an iconic figure, a symbol of many things for many people. He is seen variously as the great opponent of European colonialism, as a champion of civil rights for racial, religious and other minorities, as an important critic of the industrial system of production, as a great pacifist, or as a person who stood for the need to resist injustice non-violently in a way that provides a vivid demonstration of the superior morality of the protester. Some believe that his greatest quality lay in his ability to reach out to the poor and oppressed. As the Indian political leader Rammanohar Lohia once stated: 'tens of millions throughout the world saw in him their spokesman, the solace and the remedy for their sufferings and distress.'[1]

In its last issue of the twentieth century, *Time* magazine selected Gandhi as joint runner-up (with Franklin Roosevelt) to Albert Einstein as 'person of the twentieth century'. He was singled out as the century's foremost

representative of 'the crusade for civil rights and individual liberties'.[2] A commentator in this issue stated that 'Gandhi is that rare great man held in universal esteem, a figure lifted from history to moral icon.'[3] Nevertheless, however great the esteem, Gandhi has always been a controversial figure. Not least, this was because he took a strong stand on many important issues, in the process coming into sharp conflict with a range of opponents. Born on 2 October 1869 in the seaport of Porbandar within Kathiawad (or Saurashtra) in western India, he trained as a lawyer in England and then took up work in South Africa in 1893.s From the start, he refused to accept the inferior status imposed on Indians by a racist ruling class and resolutely fought the various restrictions that had been imposed on his fellows there. In the process, he developed the new technique of civil resistance now universally known as *satyagraha*, deploying it to powerful effect against the white rulers in South Africa and, later, opponents in India. He also developed his idiosyncratic social vision there—representing another sharp challenge to accepted ways of thought—and established small communes in which an alternative way of life could be practised on a daily basis. His political, social and spiritual development during those years led to his manifesto of 1909— *Hind Swaraj*, or 'Indian Self-Rule'—a work that was considered so scandalous by the British that it was banned in India and which is now considered by many to be his tour de force.

Gandhi returned to India in 1915, and, after a period of settling in, soon established himself as a champion of the peasantry, leading to confrontations with white indigo planters in Champaran in 1917 and the colonial tax bureaucracy in Kheda in 1918. He also led a successful strike in Ahmedabad—his base at that time—by textile workers against Indian mill bosses. In 1919 he staged his first all-India protest—the Rowlatt Satyagraha —and followed this up in 1920 by gaining control over the Indian National Congress and launching the Non-Co-operation Movement, in which Indians withdrew their support for British colonial institutions. This was followed in later years by two more powerful confrontations with the British

—the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930–4 and the Quit India Movement of 1942.

While struggling against colonial rule, Gandhi also sought to build alternative social, political and economic institutions in India through his 'constructive programme'. This brought him into conflict with many powerful vested interests within Indian society. The area he focused on in particular was the practice of untouchability. He saw this as a social disgrace and a blot on Hindu religion, and his stance inevitably led to a clash with many high-caste Hindus whose privileges rested on this practice. In time his work in this sphere led also to a bitter dispute with a new leader of the Untouchables, B.R. Ambedkar. As an Untouchable by birth, Ambedkar resented what he experienced of Gandhi's paternalistic manner, and during the 1930s he became increasingly critical of Gandhi's whole approach to the issue, feeling that it provided no adequate means for the successful assertion of his community.

Gandhi was also in dispute with Marxists and socialists within the nationalist movement. Many on the political left saw him as merely the leader of an emerging bourgeoisie who was playing a 'historical role' in mobilising the Indian masses, deploying a rhetoric and appeal which provided a link between a traditionalist peasantry and the Indian middle class. They argued that while Gandhi appeared to stand for the interests of the masses, he was in fact an agent of the bourgeoisie, always serving their interests when it came to the crunch.[4] He was, furthermore, criticised on the left for his focus on social and moral issues, such as untouchability and the 'evil' of liquor-drinking, which were seen to be 'distractions' from the central struggle against colonialism and class-based exploitation.

Gandhi found himself in sharp disagreement also with Islamic separatists who became of increasing political importance in India from the mid-1920s. Muslims made up about a quarter of the entire population of the subcontinent and were in a majority in the north-west and in east Bengal.

The demand led, in 1940, to the demand for a separate nation-state for Muslims in the Muslim-majority areas, to be called Pakistan. Muhammad Ali Jinnah, an old political rival of Gandhi, became the leader of this movement. Jinnah took the issue to the streets in 1946, which led to terrible riots in Calcutta and then other parts of India. The Congress leaders began to view Muslim-majority areas as a possible liability for the fledgling nation-state, and decided reluctantly in 1947 to agree to the division of the subcontinent into two nations—India and Pakistan. Gandhi believed this to be a tragic mistake that negated the secular principles of the nationalist movement. His fears were realised when the process of partition, which began on 15 August 1947, led to a genocidal conflict between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs in the north-west of the subcontinent. Hundreds of thousands died and millions became refugees. Gandhi worked tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of that terrible time, fasting to maintain communal peace, and insisting that the Muslims who remained in India should be treated as full and respected citizens of the new nation-state. Many Hindus saw him as pandering to these supposed 'traitors from within', and in January 1948 a Hindu extremist assassinated him at a prayer meeting in Delhi.

From all this, it is clear that Gandhi had many opponents, detractors and enemies throughout his life. He was accused, variously, of being an irresponsible trouble-maker by his colonial masters, a destroyer of social harmony by Indian traditionalists, a backward-looking crank by modernisers and progressives, an authoritarian leader by those within the movement who resented his style of leadership, a Hindu chauvinist by many Muslims, and a defender of high-caste élitism by lower-caste activists.

Some historians have argued that Gandhi's significance was limited to a specific historical situation—that of the decline of European colonialism at a time when it was in any case a waning force in the world. It is argued that Gandhi could only have succeeded against the relatively benign and liberal British; more ruthless rulers would have crushed him and his movement

without a qualm. Others argue that Gandhi's particular brand of nationalism was important in mobilising the masses, but that it had to give way in time to the more hard-headed nationalism of state power and rapid economic development. Partha Chatterjee has thus described the Gandhian period in Indian history as a 'moment of manoeuvre', arguing that it was superseded by a more mature national capitalist ideology in the Nehruvian 'moment of arrival'.[5] Gail Omvedt has claimed in like vein: 'The events of independence and partition brought a near-complete *marginalisation of Gandhi and Gandhism*.'[6]

The problem with arguments such as these is that they fail to help us understand the reasons why Gandhis ideas continue to resonate in the world today. It is hardly adequate, for example, to see Gandhi merely as a backward-looking representative of a 'traditional' culture that was being destroyed inexorably by the forces of modernity. Although a few of his admirers may have been and continue to be driven by a nostalgia for a romanticised past, the majority have been and are moved by a strong desire to evolve a better world in the light of existing realities. We have to try to situate Gandhi's controversial legacy within the modern world in a more satisfactory manner.

In this book, I intend to examine Gandhi as a figure whose life and work represented a dialogue between the many complex strands of thought of his day, both Indian and extra-Indian, as well as his legacy in India and the world since his death. Gandhi, on the one hand, cast a critical eye over his own society, deploying against it some of the values of the European Enlightenment, such as the doctrines of human rights, egalitarianism and democracy. On the other hand, being a colonised subject who resented most keenly the inferior status imposed on him by an imperial system, his positions were inevitably highly critical of many strands of this thought, such as its belief in the superiority of Western culture, its materialism and what he regarded as its amoral pursuit of knowledge. He claimed that in many areas of life, Indian values were better by far.

In his debate with the British who ruled India in his day, Gandhi deployed several thinkers who came from the European intellectual tradition. Those whom he endorsed most strongly tended to be ones who were most critical of the ruling ideologies of their societies, and Gandhi drew on them to advance his own critique of the systems of thought associated with the hegemony of British imperialism. In this respect he was involved in a continuing dialogue with thinkers located outside India who were by no means marginal figures, but, in many cases, respected theorists whose critiques might be disputed, but could hardly be ignored.

In India, he sought to open up a series of dialogues with his many opponents and rivals. In trying to establish a common ground as a basis for an agreement, he was often willing to alter his own views if he found them to be inadequate to the situation. He was thus involved in a series of long-running debates with Indian thinkers, such as the leader of the Untouchables B.R. Ambedkar, the Congress socialist Jayprakash Narayan, the Bengali sage Rabindranath Tagore, the left-wing liberal Jawaharlal Nehru, and Marxists such as M.N. Roy. These debates were sustained over decades, and in many cases both sides moved considerably in their position as a result of the dialogue. M.N. Roy, for instance, who began as an outspoken critic of Gandhi from a Marxian perspective, gradually came to appreciate Gandhian methods, in particular the emphasis on the ethics of struggle.[7] Gandhi similarly moved in his final years towards a more socialistic understanding of the need for an element of class conflict in the struggle for greater social equity, and this was because he kept an open mind towards his socialist critics.

Gandhi's style of writing was, similarly, dialogic rather than mono-logic. Rather than providing clear-cut authorial statements of the sort defined by the 'Bakhtin circle' theorist V.N. Volosinov as 'linear' or 'rational dogmatic'—a style seen most strongly during the period of the European Enlightenment[8]—Gandhi presented both sides of the case, but in a manner which might lead both himself and his adversary towards a resolution,

which he considers the 'truth'. This is seen very clearly in the work that is often taken as seminal, *Hind Swaraj*, which is set out in the form of a debate between an 'Editor' (Gandhi) and a 'Reader' (Gandhi's adversary). According to Gandhi, the book reflected an actual debate that he engaged in with fellow nationalists at that time.[9] He appears also to have been influenced in part by the example of Socrates, and cites a book called *The Death and Defence of Socrates* in his list of recommended further reading at the end of the work. Possibly more importantly, he appears also to have been guided by the debate between Krishna and Arjun as set out in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Here a mortal debates with a deity and, as might be expected, is made to accept an unpalatable higher Truth.

We find this quality also in Gandhi's autobiography, where the debate was more of an inner one, documenting his personal struggles to arrive at guiding principles in life through continuing experiments in living.[10] Elsewhere, his body of thought was set out to a large extent in newspaper editorials, letters to individuals, speeches to audiences, dashed-off memos and the like. His statements were highly contextualised, and framed in relation to an individual or a particular group always likely to fire back a quick reply. Because fresh situations often required new thinking, Gandhi was not afraid to change his mind.

Gandhi never sought to provide a grand political theory, e.g. an ideological system. He worked out his theory—his 'truth'—as praxis, and understood that it had to evolve constantly in relation to his and other people's experience. He understood that this quest could lead to inconsistencies, because life is like that. On this he said: 'I must admit my many inconsistencies. But since I am called "Mahatma", I might well endorse Emerson's saying that "foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds." There is, I fancy, a method in my inconsistencies.'[11] The method was, essentially, the dialogic—one in which knowledge is seen to arise from discussion, rather than from a unified philosophical system which is provided in the form of a treatise from which the internal contradictions

have, ideally, been removed. As V.N. Volosinov argued: 'Any true understanding is dialogic in nature.'[12] By this, Volosinov meant that understanding does not come through individual revelation, but is reached through dialogues. Through such dialogues, systems of knowledge are both challenged and enriched. Gandhian knowledge was set forth as a debate between people with opposing points of view, but there was always a search for a common ground, allowing a compromise and a going forward.

Ronald Terchek has argued that in this respect Gandhi adopted the Enlightenment position of valorising rational debate over coercion to solve problems. However, whereas it was a confident belief of the Enlightenment *philosophes* that rationality was indivisible and general, Gandhi understood that different peoples have their own definitions of what is 'rational', and to insist on the universality of one form of 'rationality over another, and to thereby justify the imposition of one's will on others, represents no more than coercion by another name. In the process, alternative rationalities are silenced.[13] Gandhi thus insisted that we should try always to be open to the voice of the adversary, that is, the ego's Other. In other words, Gandhi's was a dialogic, as opposed to coercive, form of rationality.

Something of the quality of Gandhi's beliefs in this respect come through from a statement he made at a conference in East Bengal in 1940, when he was faced with hostile slogan shouting by supporters of Subhash Chandra Bose.

> I just now heard some people shouting, 'Down with Gandhism.' Those who want to put down Gandhism have every right to say so. Those who have come to hear me will please keep quiet and not get excited by hostile slogans nor shout counter-slogans of '*Gandhijiki Jai'*. If you are non-violent, you should calmly tolerate such slogans. If there is any trace of untruth in Gandhism, it must perish. If it contains truth, lakhs and crores of voices clamouring for its destruction will not destroy it. Allow freedom to those who want to say anything against Gandhism. That will cause no harm. Do not bear any grudge or malice against

> them. You cannot realise ahimsa unless you can calmly tolerate your opponent.[14]

Although Gandhi believed that there was a universal Truth that he equated with God, he never believed that he or any other human could ever comprehend this absolute in an adequate way. Human 'truths' were for him contingent and contextual, being reached through experience, praxis, debate and dialogue. His 'truth' was thus evolving and changing constantly; being in fact a series of 'truths'—with the 't' in lower case—rather than '*the* Truth'. In this respect, his approach to knowledge was not in practice so different to that of the scientist. He abhorred certainties, preferring debates and honest disagreements to unthinking assent. As his follower, Ramachandra Rao, once said 'Gandhi was bored by those who always agreed with him. He always enjoyed discussion and argument when there was a basis of agreement which made the exchange of differing ideas meaningful.'[15] Gandhi did not view the scriptures of any religion as being in any way exempt from moral scrutiny. Rather, he viewed such texts as human creations that had to be approached dialogically. He therefore scrutinised each in the light of his own lived experience. If the text came into conflict with his beliefs, then he was not prepared to give it credence.[16]

In this, Gandhi was by no means certain of his own personal truths; he doubted himself constantly, being torn between his Reason and his Faith by a powerful anguish. In seeking to resolve these contradictions through a courageous praxis, Gandhi reached out to make his suffering a matter of deep public concern. Just as Marx doubted whether he would qualify as a 'Marxist', so Gandhi distanced himself constantly from 'Gandhism'. As he stated:

> I love to hear the words: 'Down with Gandhism'. An 'ism' deserves to be destroyed. It is a useless thing. The real thing is non-violence. It is immortal. It is enough for me if it remains alive. I am eager to see Gandhism wiped out at an earlier date. You should not give yourselves

> over to sectarianism. I do not belong to any sect. I have never dreamt of establishing any sect. If any sect is established in my name after my death my soul would cry out in anguish.[17]
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> In truth, I myself do not know what Gandhism means. I have not given anything new to the country. I have only given a new form to the traditional [wisdom] of India. It would therefore be wrong to call it Gandhism.[18]
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> I assure all my admirers and friends that they will please me better if they will forget the Mahatma and remember Gandhiji ... or think of me simply as Gandhi.[19]

Ashis Nandy has pointed out, in this respect, how Gandhi did not attempt to provide a strongly systematised theory or ideology or Utopia. Rather, he provided a vision of a society that stood in constant opposition to the oppressions, hierarchies and technologies that prevailed in the world of his day. His approach represented a state of mind rather than a clear-cut theoretical system.[20]

Being human, and always in the thick of a constant clamour for his attention, with momentous consequences often hinging on his pronouncements and actions, Gandhi did not always practice his principles adequately. He could at times be querulous, intolerant and not at all open to dialogue. For example, when Ramachandra Rao wrote to Gandhi in 1941 stating that he had been campaigning against untouchability from an 'atheistical angle' and wanted to discuss the matter with him, Gandhi replied with an irritated and curt: 'atheism is a denial of the self. No one has succeeded in its propagation.' Rao, unlike many others, did not give up. Two years later, Gandhi gave him some time and quickly realised that this particular atheist was a like-minded seeker after truth, deserving his full support.[21]

Gandhi can however be seen as closing himself off to dialogue in more important respects. In his own family, he acted the high-handed patriarch, coercing his wife and sons into following the path he decreed as 'true'. He often ran his ashrams in an autocratic manner, disciplining those who did not accept his dictates. While travelling the length and breadth of India he was constantly irritated by the huge crowds that pressed to see him, resenting what he saw as their harassment. He came to distrust the motives of many of his low-class followers, seeing in them a propensity towards violence that required strong control. He was accordingly reluctant to allow them their head in agitations. In addition, those who acted in his name often lacked his breadth of spirit and were frequently élitist in the way they related to subaltern groups. In all this, there was a constant tension, making any analysis of Gandhi s dialogue with truth difficult and problematic.

This book has two main dimensions. It involves, first, a scrutiny of Gandhi's own desired practice, that of striving to keep a wide range of dialogues open with people in many different areas of life, some of whom were his strong opponents. His not infrequent failure to live up to this ideal will be examined critically. Second, it involves an examination of dialogues between, on the one hand, a variety of political and social actors, and on the other Gandhi and his ideas and practices, both during his lifetime and after his death, in India and outside India. Thus, while providing a reading of Gandhi as a theoretical proponent of a dialogic approach, the book will at the same time seek to interrogate the ways in which he and his followers and admirers have sought to implement Gandhian ideals in practice. And last, but not least, it is a product of my own troubled dialogue with Gandhi, carried out over the past thirty years, beginning with a strong emotional commitment, developing into much profound disillusion, but with a subsequent emergence of a greater appreciation of what he stood for in the light of many horrific developments in India and the world in recent years.[22]

2

An Incorporative Nationalism

In the popular narrative of Gandhi's life—as told and retold in modern India—his nationalism is seen to have been forged through his personal experience of the dark underside of colonial rule. His autobiography provides a powerful chronicle of the series of humiliations and traumas that provided the milestones in this process. The first occurred in 1892, when he suffered the indignity of being ejected roughly from the office of the Political Agent in Rajkot when he made a request that was considered out of order. In a previous fleeting encounter in England the official had treated Gandhi in a civil manner, and Gandhi had expected the same in India. When Gandhi approached the eminent nationalist Pherozeshah Mehta with his tale of this humiliation, he was told that he would have to accept such treatment from British officials as a fact of life for Indian lawyers. He was advised to pocket the insult'. For Gandhi, this advice 'was as bitter as poison'. He had discovered that very different social rules prevailed in Britain and in India. He later stated: 'This shock changed the course of my life.'[1]

Less than a year later, Gandhi ran the full gamut of racist abuse in an epic journey from Durban to Pretoria.[2] He arrived in Durban from India to find

himself transposed in South Africa into a mere 'coolie barrister'. He attempted to deny this status by travelling out of Durban first class on the railway, and when he refused to go to a third class seat was thrown out of the train onto the platform at Maritzburg. Once again, fellow Indians told him that such experiences were their daily lot. Then, on the stage to Johannesburg, he was made to sit on the outside of the coach with the driver, rather than inside with the white passengers. When even this seat was required, he was told to sit on a dirty sack on the footboard. His protests led to a beating. When he reached Johannesburg, he was refused a room in a hotel and had to find accommodation elsewhere. He remained defiant, insisting on continuing his journey first class. On this occasion the only other passenger in the compartment, an Englishman, told the guard that he was prepared to tolerate the company of an Indian with a valid ticket. And so he reached Pretoria, somewhat vindicated.[3]

Throughout this journey, Gandhi was consistently advised by other Indians to tolerate the humiliations and adopt a low profile. However, he refused to play by the largely unwritten rules of discrimination—he insisted on his right to equality as a citizen of the Empire. He consistently took a stance that forced matters to a head: provoking either a crude and violent counter-attack or an embarrassed and shame-faced retreat. In the end, as in a parable of his life, the colonial system was made to stage a strategic withdrawal and he gained his place of uneasy equality with the Englishman. In his actual life, the struggle with imperialism and racism was of course only just beginning.

Over the next decade and a half, Gandhi continued his fight for equal citizenship. He recruited an Indian ambulance corps to care for wounded British soldiers during the Boer War, leading the South African Indians to claim the epithet 'sons of Empire'—a status soon denied in the post-war settlement.[4] In 1906 he again raised an ambulance corps during the Bambata war (the so-called 'Zulu revolt'). He continued to be moved by a feeling of sincere loyalty to the Empire: 'I then believed that the British

Empire existed for the welfare of the world.'[5] On reaching the front, he quickly discovered that the authorities had magnified a trivial incident of resistance to a colonial tax into a mighty 'rebellion' that justified a draconian response. When he and his fellow volunteers were assigned to care for wounded blacks he felt a sense of relief, as he believed them to be the wronged party. He found, to his outrage, that the whites were not prepared to give medical treatment to the blacks and even taunted them with lewd racist abuse while the Indian volunteers were treating them. He also discovered that the blacks whom they were treating had not been wounded in battle: some had been taken prisoners and flogged mercilessly, leaving festering sores. Others had not been involved in the protest but had been shot by the white soldiers 'by mistake'. He realised to his horror that the soldiers were going from village to village slaughtering innocent people. 'This', he discovered, 'was no war but a man-hunt ...'[6] This experience—more than any other—cleared his mind of delusions about British imperialism. Thereafter, he was only too aware that its liberal facade served merely to mask a brutal and systematic racism. The only honest choice open to him in the circumstances was to become an out-and-out opponent of British rule, in India and in the Empire at large.

Gandhi's progress towards a more militant nationalism during this decade was not of course unique, as the focus on his biography might imply. It was an experience shared by many of his generation and class. In the final decades of the nineteenth century, British liberals had begun to move towards a policy of devolving power within India to the Indian people, while at the same time British conservatives had fought a rearguard action in which they did their best to prevent any substantial weakening of colonial control. It was asserted in a racist manner that 'natives' lacked moral backbone, and that India could only deteriorate into chaos if they were given greater power. All this created an explosive mix of expectation and hurt pride. The first major nationalist upsurge occurred in Bengal in the period 1905–8 in what is known as the Swadeshi Movement.[7]

The manifesto that reflected Gandhi's new sentiments was the booklet of 1909 entitled *Hind Swaraj*. This melded his revulsion towards imperialism with the economic nationalism of the Swadeshi Movement. In his own account, this was another position that he claimed to have come to in a surge of emotion. He describes here how he wept when he read R.C. Dutt's *Economic History of India,* with its narration of the terrible economic damage that had been inflicted on India by the British.[8] His own programme for economic nationalism was to be built on this foundation. *Hind Swaraj* provided a powerful statement of this new spirit of nationalist militancy. It went far beyond anything the authorities in India were prepared to tolerate, and they banned it as soon as it was published there.

During the following decade, Gandhi voiced his Indian nationalism in the strongest possible terms. In 1917 he asserted: 'Only if I die for India shall I know that I was fit to live.'[9] He did not accept the argument, put forward most notably by Rabindranath Tagore, that nationalism was corrupting *per se*. Tagore believed that the end result of such an assertion was a state with greatly enhanced power, and, possibly, greater tyranny. Tagore could see only greed and violence in nationalism, and when Gandhi launched his campaign of non-cooperation in 1920, he stated that the Mahatma was playing with fire.[10]

Gandhi countered this by arguing that he was trying to forge a nationalism of a very different sort to the violent and aggressive form found in the West. He most emphatically rejected a nationalism that sought freedom through violence. He argued that terrorist methods were a foreign import and alien to the nature of Indian religion, which was suffused with the principle of *ahimsa*.[11] Violence not only had a tendency to escalate, but it also precluded dialogue. The aim should be to seek to persuade the British of the wrongness of their ways and bring about a change of heart through *satyagraha*. 'The force of arms is powerless when matched against the force of love or the soul.'[12]

Gandhi saw his goal as self-determination for the Indian people, who would then be free to work out their own destiny on their own terms. He rarely used the term 'nation', preferring concepts such as *swaraj, swadeshi*, and 'Indian civilisation'. As Bhikhu Parekh argues: 'Since the civilisation Gandhi wanted the Indian state to nurture was sympathetic, tolerant, spiritual and open, his vision of India had little in common with the collectivist, monolithic, aggressive and xenophobic nationalism of some of the Western and central European countries.'[13] And, one might add, of many Hindu chauvinists in India.[14] In 1925 he stated very firmly that although his patriotism was focused on India, it was not narrow, for—

> it included not merely the welfare of India but the whole world ... In my opinion, it is impossible for one to be an internationalist without being a nationalist.
>
> Internationalism is possible only when nationalism becomes a fact, i.e., when peoples belonging to different countries have organised themselves and are able to act as one man. It is not nationalism that is evil, it is the narrowness, selfishness, exclusiveness which is the bane of modern nations which is evil. Each one wants to profit at the expense and rise on the ruin of the other. Indian nationalism has, I hope, struck a different path. It wants to organise itself or to find full self-expression for the benefit and service of humanity at large.[15]

Gandhi's nationalism was thus broad and catholic. He hardly regarded India as a nation in a narrow sense; rather it was a civilisation with its own particular qualities. He did not condemn Europe in any blanket fashion—in contrast to those demagogic nationalists who whip up support by playing on popular ethnic and racial antagonisms. Too often, the critique of the latter of Europe and 'eurocentricity' is deployed to condemn anything which they dislike in the modern world—e.g. human rights, women's assertion, democracy, socialism, secularism and religious toleration—while the modern technologies of organisation and disciplinary control which are of

use to them—e.g. the authoritarian state, new forms of surveillance, policing, torture and armaments—are all absolved from being eurocentric or antinational. Gandhi had experienced many facets of Europe and had absorbed many doctrines propounded by European thinkers within his own philosophy of life. He also had many fast friends who were British, such as C.F Andrews. Being very aware of this, he refused to stigmatise the British for *being* British, and insisted he would be happy to accept the British as fellow-citizens of India if they changed their ways profoundly.[16] He was not interested in chauvinistic nationalism—he aspired to a universalism that soared above narrow political goals.[17]

Gandhi saw India as occupying a unique position in a differentiated family of nations. Western nations were lands of *bhoga*, whereas India was the land of karma, so that 'India is fitted for the religious supremacy of the world'.[18] Both the words used by Gandhi are complex. In Gujarati, bhoga means both enjoyments and pleasures, as well as an offering to a deity—for the enjoyment of the deity—and, by extension, a sacrifice. There is thus a suggestion that, in the West, material pleasure had attained a spiritual dimension. Karma means action, deed, conduct, behaviour, fate, luck, religious rite, the effects of past lives on the present, evil, immorality and sin. Gandhi's invocation of the quality of karma by no means sought to flatter his Gujarati audience. Rather, it reminded them of their hard destiny which made them different from the populations of the West.

Gandhi believed that India was essentially a nation even before the coming of the British. When in *Hind Swaraj* the 'reader' puts forward the argument that British rule provided the basis for Indian nationalism—in particular by providing railway communication, which allowed disparate people to come together—the 'editor' (i.e. Gandhi) replies that India was already a nation before colonial rule. The fact that the four primary places of Shaivite pilgrimage had long been established in each extremity of the subcontinent showed this.[19] Gandhi sought to define Indian nationhood in

terms of certain cultural markers of an assumed antiquity. This exercise entailed a series of inversions of colonial epistemologies of knowledge/power. For example, the colonial depiction of an Orient steeped in religion and superstition was inverted into a statement of the cultural superiority of an ancient civilisation that was based on a soaring spirituality.[20] The colonial depiction of the caste-ridden, stagnant Indian village was inverted into an argument for a harmonious and smoothly functioning social system in which humans were happy because they were comfortable with their destinies.[21] In all of this, Gandhi advanced highly essentialist arguments about the culture of each nation.

Gandhi believed that it was vital to nurture a dynamic political space that was separate from state power and which could act as a constant check on that power. Private property, held in a spirit of trusteeship, provided one such counter to state power: 'in my opinion the violence of private ownership is less injurious than the violence of the State.'[22] Another counter was provided by organisations devoted to public welfare. He thus advised members of bodies such as the Gandhi Seva Sangh, which was founded in 1923, not to expend their energies in what he called 'power politics', which included 'the politics of the Congress and elections and ... groupism.'[23] In 1948 he even advised the Congress Party to disband itself, as it had achieved its objective of winning independence for India, and he suggested putting in its place a Lok Sevak Sangh (Association for the Service of the People) which would be able to distance itself from the cut and thrust of party politics.[24] This did not mean that such social activists should not relate to politics, for he refused to see their welfare work as being in anyway 'non-political'. It was only that their politics were to operate primarily outside and beyond the struggle for direct control over the levers of power. He even went so far as to say that without such non-governmental forces operating in a dynamic and independent way 'Gandhism is sure to perish'.[25] Gandhian ideals, in other words, could only flourish within a realm of politics that was

separate from the state. All this marked off his position in a radical way from that of most political theorists and activists of his day.

Later in his life, Gandhi tempered his antagonism to state power with a realisation that the state provided perhaps the firmest guarantee available in the circumstances of the day to protect the rights of the most vulnerable in society. It could legislate to eradicate various social and economic injustices, such as untouchability, unemployment, and disparities in land ownership.[26] This was however only required as a temporary measure. He believed that as people became empowered and learnt to take full responsibility for their own affairs and developed a concern for their fellow citizens, society would develop and flourish outside the sphere of statist power politics. His ideal, in fact, was to strive towards a situation in which 'there will be no political institution and therefore no political power.' He described this as a condition of 'enlightened anarchy'.[27] He accepted that no such condition existed—or had ever existed—in the world. However, if it were to come into being anywhere, that place would be India. But a long and continuing struggle would be required.[28]

Critics of Gandhi have argued that there was no reason to believe that India was suited to such a political order, as there was no tradition of stateless societies. On the contrary, Hindu political theory enjoins a strong and autocratic kingship tempered by dharma. This was necessary to counter the general human tendency towards wickedness.[29] Scholars such as Burton Stein and David Ludden have argued, however, that power in medieval India was by no means as monolithic as is assumed by such arguments, and in fact there was often very strong segmentation of power.[30] It can also be noted that there were many Indian traditions that Gandhi could invoke in his favour, though clearly he applied them in novel ways in the climate of his day.

Gandhi often quoted Thoreau's maxim: 'that government is best which governs least.'[31] Many have seen a congruence between Gandhi's ideas on

the state and anarchist doctrine.[32] Like Gandhi, anarchists see the modern state, with its claim to a monopoly of the legal instruments of coercion, as an obstacle to the development of a genuinely democratic, co-operative and free social order. They too demand a decentralization of power, asking that local groups be given considerable degree of self-determination. Likewise, they place obedience to one's own conscience above that of obedience to the state, and moral authority over and above legal and political authority. However, while Western anarchists of Gandhi's day believed that a sharp revolutionary break was required before liberation could be achieved, Gandhi believed in gradual change through slow and patient constructive work. Also, Western anarchists were mostly atheists who saw religion as being deployed by states to bolster their power, and who regarded their beliefs as arising from a secular rational enquiry, whereas Gandhi appealed to faith, and asserted that there was no conflict between true freedom and the divine, God being Truth. An even more important difference was that anarchism was in many respects a culmination of a particular strand of liberalism that stressed the need to defend the liberty of the individual against that of the state. In such a formulation, state power is seen as fundamentally repressive and coercive. Against this, anarchists have sought, characteristically, to express their distance from power and their freedom from control by asserting their individuality, often through a bohemian lifestyle with a lack of sexual inhibition. Gandhi, by contrast, opposed the state not because he opposed control and discipline as such, but rather because he did not believe that the state should be the instrument of its expression. Instead, he demanded of himself and his followers a strongly puritanical self-restraint with a strong mental control over ones sexuality, which was far more rigorous than anything that the state might impose. In this respect, Gandhi's position was the antithesis of much Western anarchism.[33]

Gandhi believed that his ideals could be best realised through a system of decentralised self-government, which he preferred to describe as swaraj

(self-rule) rather than 'democracy' which, in its Western constitutional form, was highly statist. He proposed a system of tiered councils with a large amount of autonomy at village, sub-district, district, provincial and national levels. Each council was to elect the members of the one above it. In this way, voters would know those whom they voted for personally. From around 1930 onwards, Gandhi modified his views somewhat as he came to realise that the poor and oppressed often required support from the state. In 1946–7 he saw also that communal violence could be contained by a strong state.[34]

Forging a Nationalist Hegemony

Gandhi believed very strongly that the nation had to incorporate within it all the different cultural and religious groups of the subcontinent. In *Hind Swaraj* his 'reader' raises the problem of the Hindu–Muslim divide; doesn't this make it impossible to speak of India as one nation? The 'editor' replies that nationalism cannot be defined by religion in India. In the past there was no profound enmity between Hindus and Muslims; the British created divisions. These divides can be overcome, for 'religions are different roads converging to the same point.'[35]

The 'reader' in this passage raises the question commonly asked by colonial officials in India at that time: how could the Indian people claim nationality when they were so divided by caste and religion? The Bengali nationalist Bipin Chandra Pal had sought an answer in his concept of 'composite patriotism', which he first put forward in 1906. He held that Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and other religious minorities (including the 'animistic' tribals) should preserve their distinctive religious cultures while fighting together for freedom. This provided an important secularist modification of the late-nineteenth-century Hindu nationalist idea of *adhikar-bheda*, which involved the belief that each level or group should have its distinct rituals and beliefs while accepting that it was a part of a wider Hindu whole. Pal had extended the principle to include non-Hindus

within the fold. His proposition was criticised in 1907 by Tagore for its essentialism. Tagore wanted to move towards an ever evolving and ultimately hybrid national *mahajati*.[36] A decade later, in 1917, Annie Besant endorsed Pal's line by arguing that Indian youths should be brought up so as 'to make the Mussalman a good Mussalman, the Hindu boy a good Hindu ... Only they must be taught a broad and liberal tolerance as well as enlightened love for their own religion, so that each may remain Hindu or Mussalman, but both be Indian.'[37] After his return to India in 1915 Gandhi extended the idea of a composite nationalism to include not only religious groups but castes and communities in general. In doing so he tapped into a wide range of movements for caste and community assertion, such as that of the Patidars of his own Gujarat.[38] One historian has argued that this allowed a massive expansion of the nationalist movement in India: 'Because Gandhi had a realistic picture of India as a loose constellation of classes, communities and religious groups, he was able to activate the peoples of the subcontinent in a way no one had done before, or has since.'[39] Gandhi sought to bind this loose coalition together through moral appeals, such as outrage against the Rowlatt Acts of 1919. At the same time, he championed sectional demands, such as that of the Khilafat Movement. This move was condemned by many Hindu nationalists, as well as secularists within the Congress. Despite this, he managed for two years to hold this uneasy coalition together.

It has been argued that there were certain parallels in this respect between Gandhi and Lenin, both of whom were trying at this time to form alliances of disparate groups so as to remove oppressive rulers.[40] Lenin, who theorised his strategy in *What is to be Done?*, envisaged forging a revolutionary alliance under the hegemony of the proletariat. This was seen as a tactical move; once power had been won, the other classes within the alliance would be gradually brought into line with the interests of the proletarian revolution.[41] Lenin believed very strongly in the universal value of such a revolution. Gandhi, in building the alliances that would remove

the British, sought to bind together various ethnic, caste, class, religious and regional groups, all of which were enjoined to work out their destinies through the cleansing fire of nationalist activism. He however refused to accept the idea of the hegemony of the working class or any other class within such an alliance—this was too narrow and sectional—with all the potential for violence and tyranny that it implied. For Gandhi, it was imperative that the integrity of each group's struggle be recognised through an acceptance of a fundamental right of each minority to follow its own way of life after independence had been won. He was trying to forge a polity bound together not by congruent 'interests', but by a sense of 'neighbourliness' in which each group would respect the beliefs, and even prejudices, of its fellows for the good of the wider whole.[42] It was on such terms that Gandhi's movement achieved a strategic hegemony at this juncture in Indian history. He was to do the same at other crucial moments, such as in 1930–1 and 1942.[43]

In all cases, there was a continuing problem of articulating the national-level organisation—with its secular-democratic principles and bureaucratic structure—with local solidarities and their very different systems of belief and culture. Shahid Amin's study of the local under-standing of Gandhian politics in Gorakhpur district in 1920–2 shows how at times there was a profound chasm in this respect between the national leadership and local supporters of the movement.[44] There were inevitable tensions that could generate feelings of bad faith on both sides, particularly when Gandhi suddenly called off his protests for reasons that had nothing to do with such localised struggles. Gandhi for his part was often uncomfortable and sometimes horrified with the way in which his message was received by the masses. He was often critical of the way in which his lieutenants sought to extend the movement on the ground.[45] At times, however, the different levels were articulated with striking success, as in Bardoli in 1928. In this case Gandhi allowed his second-in-command in Gujarat, Vallabhbhai Patel, full rein to organise a campaign of non-violent civil disobedience within a

confined area, in which a small army of Congress activists reinforced the peasant protesters. The government was forced to capitulate in a most humiliating way.[46]

Antonio Gramsci has argued that the elite and subaltern classes structure their discourses in relationship to each other through 'a series of negations'.[47] Although this can produce tension, it can also lead to a working through of difference and a contingent resolution that requires a shift in the mentalities of both parties. It is in other words a dialogic process. In this process a certain hegemonic consensus may be forged, in which certain attitudes and mentalities come to be accepted as a matter of everyday common sense.[48]

We can see this process being worked through in a number of spheres. For example, the secular nationalist belief in equality before the law, and Gandhi's insistence on the right of all to voice their demands through a dialogic form of civil resistance, became a matter of common sense for large numbers of poor Indians. Many areas of Indian identity came to be accepted as given, as with the Gandhian 'national dress' or the Indian flag that was fought for in a series of 'flag satyagrahas'.[49] Even Gandhi's somewhat extraordinary belief in the intrinsic civilisational non-violence of the Indian people was accepted to a surprising degree by large numbers of Indians at the time. There were however obvious failures, the greatest of all being the emphatic rejection of both the principle of non-violence and that of a subcontinental national unity that cut across religious divides in the terrible events of the Partition of 1947 and in subsequent campaigns of communal aggression.

The Disciplined Nation

For Gandhi swaraj entailed above all what he called a 'disciplined rule from within'.[50] In this, he distinguished swaraj from mere 'freedom' or

'independence', which he claimed were English words lacking such connotations and which could be taken to mean a license to do whatever one wishes. His swaraj allowed no such irresponsible freedom, but demanded rather a rigorous moulding of the self and a heavy sense of responsibility. Above all it required *tap* or *tapas*—Hindi terms meaning an ascetic and rigorous self-discipline.[51] Tapas involved much hard work and sweat, which reflects the Sanskrit root of the term, that of *tap*, or 'heat'. The devotee was supposed to expose the body to 'five fires'— that of the four seasons and to the sun burning from above.[52] For the ascetic, tapas was the path to liberation and spiritual power.

Discipline has in fact a dual character—it is both empowering and repressive. This truth is stated most succinctly in the Gujarati proverb: 'discipline is power: power is discipline' (*tapne ante raj, ne rajne ante tap*).[53] In his analysis of power, Michel Foucault has emphasised the latter quality, equating body-discipline with docility. Gandhi by contrast tended to deploy the term in the sense of *tap*, which is of a rigorous training designed to give oneself internal strength and to develop a powerful conscience.[54] He argued that a conscience that had been developed without such effort was worthless.[55] Non-violence could only be achieved through strong self-discipline.[56] As he stated in 1924: 'the richest grace of *ahimsa* will descend easily upon the owner of hard discipline'.[57] Without *tapasya*, India would never be free: 'We can be certain that once the spirit of discipline comes to pervade our lives, we shall be able to get anything we may want.'[58] He was clear in his mind that such *tap* was different from repressive forms of discipline. For example, when describing the party discipline imposed by the whips of the British Parliament, he described this as a 'so-called discipline'.[59] *Tap* was very different, for 'restraint self-imposed is no compulsion.'[60] However, as we shall see, he resorted to an unqualified language of coercive discipline at certain historical junctures.

For Gandhi, one of the strongest paths to the achievement of *tap* was celibacy, or *brahmacharya*. In *Hind Swaraj* he stated that 'Chastity is one of the greatest disciplines without which the mind cannot attain requisite firmness.'[61] In an important article in *Young India* of 1920, he demanded that celibacy be central to national reform.[62] Sexuality was for him a very public concern. In this, he tapped a chord among the literate public in India. When he published a booklet in 1927 called *Self-Restraint vs. Self-Indulgence*, the first edition sold out in one week, and it was reprinted many times. In his preface to the second edition of this work Gandhi wrote: 'Let young men and women for whose sake *Young India* is written from week to week know that it is their duty, if they would purify the atmosphere about them and shed their weakness, to be and remain chaste and know too that it is not so difficult as they may have been taught to imagine.'[63] He also claimed that: 'Though a body that has been developed without *brahmacharya* may well become strong, it can never become completely healthy from the medical point of view.'[64] He held that sexual indulgence undermined health. Constipation, for example, was caused by sexual arousal. He attributed his own illnesses, such as pleurisy, dysentery, and appendicitis to his 'imperfect celibacy'.[65] Gandhi advocated celibacy as the surest means through which the Indian people could sustain their health and decolonise their bodies.[66]

In this, Gandhi was inspired in part by European writers, such as the Frenchman Paul Bureau who published a book in 1920 titled *L'Indiscipline des moeurs* which made a strong appeal for French moral nationalism. Gandhi quoted Bureau's concluding statement—'The future is for those nations who are chaste.' He also cited William Loftus Hare, who in *Generation and Regeneration* had argued that sex had an enervating physiological effect. Gandhi also found a supporter in William R. Thurston, a major in the United States Army, who provided statistical evidence to back a claim that frequent sexual intercourse undermined the health of both men and women, leaving them unable to care properly for their families.[67]

Influenced by such polemics, Gandhi had a disturbing tendency to resort to a crude Malthusian and Social Darwinist language. He stated, for example that excessive intercourse bred too many children: 'Do we think that the world is going to be saved by the countless swarms of such impotent children endlessly multiplying in India and elsewhere?' Early marriage and early sexuality led to the breeding of 'a race of cowardly, emasculated and spiritless creatures'. Self-restraint would allow the emergence of 'a nation of strong and handsome well-formed men and women'.[68]

As these quotations reveal, Gandhi was often exasperated by the failure of the masses to live up to his disciplinary ideals. When faced with the chaotic enthusiasm of the crowd during periods of mass agitation, Gandhi had no qualms about deploying the language of coercive discipline: 'The great task before the nation today is to discipline its demonstrations if they are to serve any useful purpose.' 'The nation must be disciplined to handle mass movements in a sober and methodical manner.' He demanded from the crowd 'implicit obedience.'[69] This was to be applied by trusted followers who shared his values.

In this emphasis on the need to maintain an austere discipline at all times during the course of a struggle, Gandhi distanced himself firmly from the more carnivalesque elements of popular culture. In this, he was clearly not in tune with Mikhail Bakhtin. In *Rabelais and his World,* Bakhtin celebrated popular carnival, which he saw as mocking and rejecting the medieval valorisation of asceticism and otherworldly spirituality. Through carnival, the 'immutable' and 'eternal' were brought down to earth.[70] The problem with this argument is that while the powerful may be lampooned or 'shamed' at such times of role reversal, vulnerable minorities are frequently targeted as well in an often vicious manner. Such festivities can cause great social damage while at the same time doing little to change oppressive relations of power in any meaningful way.[71] Gandhi had reason to insist on

the overriding importance of a dignified civility within any act of moral opposition.

Gandhi's concept of discipline was, therefore, full of tension. He worked it through in his own life in his own idiosyncratic manner. His followers had to do the same, with varying degrees of success. In some cases, the desire for discipline had questionable sexual overtones. There is for example the case of a Tamil Brahman follower of Gandhi who recounted the feelings he had shared with other satyagrahi when faced by state aggression during the Civil Disobedience movement in Bombay:

> Whenever a man was struck down, two others rushed up to be struck down in his place ... I remember a young man in front of me that a soldier was threatening with his raised rifle-butt, while shouting, 'Get back or I'll hit you!' 'Hit me then!' answered the young man. 'I shall imagine that you are my father and that you are doing it for my good.' Such a spirit of grace spread among the rioters that it was almost tangible. I felt it on the nape of my neck like a warm breath. When it was my turn to pass under the blows, I received them without feeling anything. I even think that I have never been so close to happiness.[72]

Taken to this level, from a process of protest to that of a search for ecstatic experience, such self-discipline becomes troubling and problematic, for it is being taken outside the realm of mass assertion to that of an individualistic sadomasochistic sexuality, in which—in this case—the young man desires violent discipline from patriarchal father-figures. It is hard to describe this as a commitment to the principles of Gandhian non-violence, as Lanza del Vasto, who recorded the statement, seeks to do.[73]

There has been a tendency for many self-perceived 'Gandhians' to apply a mechanical, narrow-minded and self-righteous discipline to themselves and others in a way that is deeply unattractive. Whereas Gandhi tempered his discipline—of both kinds—with a strong sense of compassion and personal humility, as well as a self-deprecating sense of humour, many of these

'Gandhians' have willed themselves to carry out social, charitable and political work not because they feel for the suffering of the poor but because they see it as a path to personal moral salvation. Such people have helped create an image of a 'Gandhian personality that is reviled rather than revered in popular imagination in India.

The former Prime Minister of India Morarji Desai, who always made great show of his 'Gandhian' principles in his day-to-day life, provides a good example. His autobiography is written in a style that imitates Gandhi's own autobiography, the difference being that he seems to be blind to the possibility that he could ever have made any mistakes. In one chapter of this work he describes in a self-satisfied manner how he expended great energy, while Home Minister of Bombay in the late 1940s, in disciplining the masses. Among other things he forced commuters to stand in orderly queues at bus stops, even posting police to create the correct atmosphere of 'discipline'; he censored films 'which could lead society astray and also prove harmful to the maintenance of social morality'; and, as a postscript, he orchestrated the brutal suppression of strong communist-led movements of workers and Adivasis throughout the state. When the police shot down some eight or nine protesters in Amalner he refused to sanction any enquiry, stating that: 'If the police, whose work on such occasions was difficult, were not given protection, then those who create disturbances would get encouraged and succeed in their mischievous aims.'[74] This trait of murderous intolerance towards dissidence was revealed again after he finally achieved his goal of becoming Prime Minister of India in 1977- In a conversation with the Naga rebel leader Z.A. Phizo in London in 1978, he was heard saying that 'I will exterminate the Nagas without compunction.'[75]

Another Gandhian known for his inflexibility was Vinoba Bhave, whom Ramachandra Guha has characterised as 'a pious, puritan, and self-righteous man, devoid of humour and the capacity for self-criticism', who constantly sought to impress his superior virtuosity on those around him.[76] His taste for discipline extended beyond the realm of the personal to that of violent

state repression. This was revealed most strikingly when he backed Indira Gandhi's declaration of Emergency in 1975, with its informing slogan: 'Discipline is the Need of the Hour'. With men such as Desai and Bhave, the notion of discipline was emptied of the qualities it had with Gandhi, being invested instead with a coercive and deathly monologic.

Invented Histories of the Nation

Nationalist ideologues have almost invariably sought to construct histories that have defined, valorised and naturalised the community that is said to form the nation, while excluding those who are seen to lie outside its bounds. In nineteenth-century India, this typically involved a celebration of the ancient Indian Hindu polity, as against that of the later Muslim and British invaders. In particular, the military valour and power of old Hindu rulers was invoked, the message being that salvation for India lay in a return to such values. This was a plea for an aggressive and militaristic nation-state which would wipe away the shame of centuries of subjugation of the Hindu by 'outsiders'.[77] The divisive communal implications of such a stance are obvious, and it was countered most typically by a secular-nationalist historiography which sought to align both Muslim and Hindu against the colonial 'Other' by stressing a shared syncretic past. The lesson of history in this case was seen to be that religious tolerance was a necessary basis for a successful polity. This strand of historical understanding laid less stress on a militaristic ethos, the emphasis being on the need for a strong but enlightened centralised state power.[78] Other groups sought to valorise different histories, such as the Dravidian nationalists of Tamil Nadu who depicted the Aryan invaders as the oppressors of the indigenous Dravidians, replacing an egalitarian social system with a rigid and oppressive caste hierarchy.[79]

These various nationalisms have all been rooted in a mode of reasoning which treats history as a narrative of a unilinear progress towards an ideal.

In the case of nationalism, this becomes the nation-state, but in other formulations it may be different ideals, such as liberalism, socialism, communism. In all cases, the study of history is seen as a 'scientific' exercise undertaken both to reveal the path of this progress as well as to analyse setbacks and regressions in a manner that will help the observer to avoid making such mistakes in future. History is seen to be driven forward by conscious acts of human will rooted in such a historical consciousness.

Gandhi was profoundly sceptical of this way of thinking. He realised very acutely that his own willed action often produced the most unexpected consequences. He refused to accept the notion of unilinear historical time, understanding that the present was suffused with the past in a way that constantly undercut the working of the rational will to modernity.[80]

In this, Gandhi was almost certainly influenced by the writings of Tolstoy, whose translated works he had read avidly during his days in South Africa.[81] In the second part of the epilogue to *War and Peace,* Tolstoy set out a lengthy critique, stretching over twelve chapters, of the discipline of history. Tolstoy condemned the belief held by most 'general historians' that history was formed out of the rational exercise of power by great men: 'general historians almost invariably return to the idea that power is one which does produce events, and that it stands to events in the relation of cause to effect.'[82] 'Historians of civilisation', on the other hand, argue that history represented the working out of rational ideals. Yet, Tolstoy noted, the idea of the equality of man had led to the terror of the French Revolution—the very negation of that idea.[83] It is thus absurd to hold that formative events of the past have been the product of the dreams of intellectuals.[84] Historical events are produced by a great many people acting in a whole range of ways, with highly unpredictable outcomes.[85] People often believe that they are free agents in all this, whereas they are in fact governed by forces beyond their control, which Tolstoy describes as 'the unknown substance of life'.[86] He ends his great novel by concluding that 'denial must be made of a freedom

which is non-existent, and recognition be accorded to a dependence of which we are not personally conscious.'[87]

What was this 'unknown substance of life' on which we all depend? There is no clear answer in the novel, but the subsequent trajectory of Tolstoy's thought was to recognise this as the divine. Gandhi's study of Tolstoy appears to have helped him frame his own critique of the whole methodology of history-writing. When in jail between 1922 and 1924, he read Edward Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Several of his English friends had strongly recommended that he read this massive work. He also read J.L.Motley's *Rise of the Dutch Republic*—a history of the Netherlands in the seventeenth century—and Lord Rosebery's *Life of Pitt*. He appreciated the breadth of knowledge and scholarship of Gibbon's work in particular. However, he felt that although Gibbon and Motley claimed to present the 'facts and nothing but the facts'—thus allowing the reader to supposedly exercise his or her judgement—'facts' were always open to dispute. Taking a passage from Rosebery, he remarked wryly that even Pitt's supposed 'last words' were denied by his butler. What remained, therefore, was a presentation of an argument by each author. Gandhi found that these histories were in reality no more than biographies of states, whether of the Roman or British empires, or the Dutch Republic.[88]

For Gandhi, academic history was thus an exercise in bad faith—claiming objectivity in relation to the myths that it sought to construct. The great myths of the past, most notably the *Mahabharata*, were more honest in this, as they did not claim to be factual or scientific. Because facticity was such a dubious matter, Gandhi preferred to judge all narratives of the past not in terms of their historicity, but in terms of the spiritual truths to which they provided access. In this respect, he believed the statist histories of Gibbon and Motley to be very inferior to the *Mahabharata,* a work of profound and lasting truth. He concluded: 'Truth transcends history.'[89]

In Gandhi's view, human betterment thus lay in the realm of ethics (his 'truth') rather than in the working out of an illusory historical progress. Action dictated by an abstract historical need could never achieve the desired results. It was by defining an ethical life, and living according to that ideal in a very direct way, that one could do good in the world. Gandhi thus refused to try to justify his beliefs through an appeal to any historical meta-narrative. Although he frequently evoked a time of past harmony rooted in the self-sufficient village community, he never sought to historicise this structure of being but allowed it to remain amorphous. It represented for him a space that was non- conflictual, non-militaristic, and imbued with a spirit of neighbourliness. It was a clearly mythical construct, but so—he argued—were all of the others, and it had the advantage of allowing a space for dialogue, rather than foreclosing it, as the other more historicised mythical constructs tended to do.

Ashis Nandy has argued that Gandhi valorised myth over history, thus adopting a 'traditional' Indian stance towards the past. He distinguishes this from a 'Judeo-Christian cosmology' that sees history as developing dialectically and materially in a way which limits the possibilities for the future, as people cannot, in this view, transcend the dialectic of a given time and period. This is why it is considered important in the latter tradition to study the details of history, for each situation produces its own unique dialectic. Gandhi, Nandy asserts, refused to be limited by such determinism, preferring in its place the openness of myth. Myth, rather than history, established the parameters for his action.[90] Sunil Khilnani has claimed that in this respect Gandhi displayed a deep empathy with the subaltern world of groups that lacked 'history', and whose imaginings were of a mythic past that was punctuated by the appearance of saintly figures.[91] Ashis Nandy speaks similarly of 'the salience given by Indian culture to myth as structured fantasy which, in its dynamic of the here-and-the-now, represents what in an other culture would be called the dynamic of history... In Gandhi,

the specific orientation to myth became a more general orientation to public consciousness.'[92]

There are two problems with this sort of argument. First, Gandhi himself did not counterpoise myth against history in such a way. He saw no need to valorise myth over a historicised consciousness, as if the two form binary and contradictory opposites. He held that ethics transcended both. As he well realised, myth in itself is no better as a guide to ethical action than history. It can inspire such action, but it can also give rise to unethical behaviour. This becomes apparent if we examine the recent appeal by Hindu chauvinists to the myth of Ram Janmabhumi in Ayodhya as a justification for vicious attacks on Muslims.[93] Neither myth nor history is infallible in this respect; in the last instance one has to be guided by one's core beliefs. There is a certain circularity in this, for these core beliefs are themselves forged through a complex dialogic which engages a person's life experience with both myth and history. Gandhi had a strong sense of history that was expressed most strongly in his critique of colonialism, and he was guided by it in part in his political choices and strategies. His understanding of history was at times profoundly insightful, at times highly dubious, but never less than lively and engaged.

Furthermore, and this is a secondary problem, Gandhi's ethics were by no means in accord with many popular structures of feeling, as expressed in myth. Thus, while poor peasants and pastoralists of Mewar and Saurashtra valorised the mythical *bhakti sant* Mirabai for her resistance to Rajput patriarchy, or for the persecution and hardship which she suffered in exile, Gandhi projected her as a sanitised ideal of Brahmanical widowhood.[94] And, when the peasants of Gorakhpur created their own myth of the mahatma from a highly selective appropriation of his 'saintly message', their veneration was to lead to a blood-drenched and disastrous clash with the police and a strong public condemnation by Gandhi.[95] Subaltern mythology frequently valorised the physical prowess of male heroes in epics of violent

resistance, acts of conspicuous consumption or sexual aggression, revealing a 'wild' consciousness far removed from the Gandhian ethos.[96]

If we believe that history is a discipline rooted in the paradigms of unilinear evolutionary progress and state-centred narrative, then Gandhi's critique has great value. Dipesh Chakrabarty has described this as 'an imperious code that accompanied the civilizing process that the European Enlightenment inaugurated in the eighteenth century as a world-historical task.'[97] However, this paradigm is widely challenged today by historians whose narratives seek to show that there are many competing histories and possibilities, and that the subject of the discipline can also be the poor and powerless—the groups which have been described as the 'fragments' which lie outside the history of the nation state.[98] Some of these histories engage in a critical manner with popular consciousness, folk narratives and myth as a means for entry into the mental world of the subaltern.[99] Such historians certainly do not consider myth as a 'primitive' form of history or the product of a 'savage' mind, as Ashis Nandy claims is the case in general within what he labels as 'Western social analysis'.[100] Neither do they seek to reify suffering through a historicist argument, as Nandy alleges is fundamental to the 'modern world view'.[101] Gandhi himself seems to have recognised the need for such a history when he stated that, 'whereas generally history is a chronicle of kings and their wars, the future history will be the history of man.'[102] For him, the ethics of such a history would be clearly superior, though never infallible.

3

Dialogic Resistance

Mass civil resistance—a form of non-violent protest carried out by large numbers of people within complex state systems—emerged in Europe in the ferment of the post-French revolutionary period. It came from the sphere of civil society—the site of a free association of individuals in public bodies, associations and the like—which were valorised in the political thought of the Enlightenment as providing a means for checking and correcting the excesses of state power and governmental authority. Civil Disobedience entailed in part an assertion of new demands for equality and liberty within state systems that claimed to represent the will of the people but were also becoming increasingly centralised and bureaucratic. In some cases it entailed a demand for self-determination by nationalities within the old dynastic empires, such as that of the Hapsburgs. In Ireland, nationalist peasants protested against British colonial rule by refusing to pay their rents and taxes. In Britain, this politics was associated with new social tensions and demands arising out of the industrial revolution, which saw on the one hand the growth of reformist campaigns by the emerging middle class, on the other a demand for rights by the working class. This all gave rise to

movements which involved mass mobilization, petitions, monster demonstrations, strikes, boycotts and the courting of arrest. These various tactics were developed and sharpened during the course of the nineteenth century, creating a new language of protest. Modern bureaucratic states resting on an industrial base are often considered to be particularly susceptible to this form of protest, as they operate through a complex process of co-operation that can be disrupted relatively easily. In the early twentieth century, we find certain groups like the suffragettes in Britain deploying such forms of resistance with great skill and to powerful effect.[1]

Civil resistance has been used to particular effect within polities that claim to conform to a rule of law while at the same time seeking to monopolise violence and criminalize any application of violence that is not wielded by the state. Modern states are geared towards dealing with violent forms of opposition, such as terrorism, and in fact they thrive on countering them, as it gives the excuse for legal increases in police power, surveillance operations, counter-terrorist measures, imprisonment without trial, summary forms of justice and the like. What they are less comfortable in dealing with is opposition that is non-violent in principle. They may try to delegitimise such protest by asserting that dissent should be expressed through the ballot box at election-time. But this argument is too obviously self-serving to carry conviction.

These forms of struggle developed in embryonic form in India long before Gandhi emerged as a leader. Notable were the indigo revolt in Bengal in 1859–62, the anti-landlord movement in Bengal of the 1870s, and the no-tax campaign in Maharashtra in 1872–3.[2] These were all mass movements in which peasant protest was supported by fractions of the elite, such as English-educated, middle class and generally high- caste Indians, certain paternalistic colonial officials, and socially concerned missionaries. The arguments advanced by these sympathetic elites were designed to appeal to the concerns and morals of the colonial rulers. There was a stress on the need to grant concessions so as to stave off a discontent which could assume

dangerous proportions if left to fester. Appeals were made to liberal values concerning civil rights and equity, and to a neo-classical economic morality that was seen to be violated by feudal practices. Leaders, like the Reverend James Long in Bengal in 1860, opened themselves up to imprisonment in defence of such principles, and in so doing embarrassed the government into backing down.[3]

Gandhi was inspired and influenced by these various protests in India and elsewhere. In 1907, for example, he praised the campaigns of passive resistance waged by the Hungarian nationalists against the Hapsburgs between 1849 and 1867, and by Sinn Fein against British rule in Ireland.[4] He came to understand very clearly the weak points of the modern polity, and deployed his particular form of protest to powerful effect. His stress on the imperative for non-violence in civil resistance represented a highly creative intervention within both political theory and practice. For him, non-violence was a 'truth' that could be worked through and understood only through a disciplined and arduous application in specific situations. In this way he took such resistance on to a new level, with a resonance that was global in extent. This has been acknowledged by Michael Randle in his book *Civil Resistance*, in which he argues that Gandhi is 'the figure whose actions and ideas have most crucially influenced the development of civil resistance in the twentieth century ...'[5] In this chapter we shall examine the various ways in which Gandhi forged this new praxis. It was based in part on the forms of civil resistance that had been developed in Europe, the United States and India, in part on his own strong moral principles, and in part through a dialogue with various modes of moral protest and mass resistance already practised in India.

Popular Forms of Mass Resistance in India

Popular resistance took many forms in India in the past, as Ranajit Guha has shown in his seminal study on the subject.[6] These acts of resistance may be

situated at varying points on a scale that ranges from the coercive to the dialogic. In situations in which the ruling classes were closed to any dialogue with the people and in which they enforced their will by brute force, action by insurgents was likely to involve counter-violence. This frequently involved a complex politics of ritual shaming, in which the object of popular hatred was seized and humiliated. For example, peasants of the Indian Himalaya would catch an unpopular official, shave his hair and moustache, blacken his face, and parade him around the village mounted backwards on a donkey.[7] It was rare for insurgents to kill even the most violent of oppressors.[8]

In situations in which channels were kept open for dialogue, protests might be almost entirely non-violent. In the Himalayan hill states there was a practice known as *dhandak* in which the aggrieved people marched to the capital city and demanded an audience with the monarch. There was a certain ritual to this—the ruler would appear before them and promise to look into the matter, after which they would disperse. The people believed that they were helping their ruler by drawing his attention to a rottenness within his state.[9]

Similar sorts of dialogic protest were institutionalised within the Rajput states of Rajasthan. For example, in June 1921 around 10,000 peasants of Udaipur state marched to the capital and camped before the palace of the maharana, Fateh Singh, demanding an audience. They threatened to stop all produce from being brought into the city if their grievances were not looked into. They had to wait several days before Fateh Singh agreed to receive a delegation. The maharana was under the impression that their grievances related to various oppressions carried out by local Rajput chiefs and state officials, though he also blamed political incitement coming from British India. He refused to accept that his subjects were in anyway discontented with him. In this frame of mind, he discussed the grievances in detail and agreed to remedy several of them.[10]

Another important form of dialogic resistance was that of mass migration, or *hijrat.* During the Mughal period, peasants often protested against excessive tax demands by migrating to the territory of another ruler.[11] This weapon was deployed not only by peasants. There was a famous case involving the Baniya community of Surat during the reign of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. In 1665–6 the emperor had appointed a reactionary theologian to act as *qazi,* or civil judge, of Surat city. The qazi began a campaign of converting merchants to Islam. Several Baniya merchants were forced under pressure to become Muslims. The turning point came when a Baniya clerk serving in the qazi's establishment committed suicide after being circumcised by force. Eight thousand Baniyas left the city in protest in September 1669, going to Bharuch. All trade and business in the city came to a halt. The qazi threatened that unless they returned he would destroy the Baniyas' temples and circumcise any who remained in Surat. The Baniyas replied defiantly, saying that they would go to the emperor for justice. A lengthy correspondence followed between the merchants, the qazi and Aurangzeb. In the end the emperor dismissed the qazi and wrote a letter to the Baniyas promising them security and greater religious freedom. They then returned to Surat.[12] Gandhi was well aware of this particular tradition of resistance, as it was still being used in Saurashtra when he was a youth. As he stated in 1909: 'I remember an instance when, in a small principality, the villagers were offended by some command issued by the prince. The former immediately began vacating the village. The prince became nervous, apologised to his subjects and withdrew his command.'[13]

There were also certain forms of protest that combined an appeal for dialogue with varying forms of self-inflicted suffering and violence. The aim was to emphasise the hurt which the aggrieved person or group claimed to have suffered, and in doing so lay the opponent open to social censure. It was commonly believed to be both dishonourable and inauspicious to ignore such an appeal, and in this way a ruler or a superordinate could be shamed into submission.

This form of protest was carried on from ancient times in India. For example, the *Manusmrtì* mentions a protest called *carita,* which involved sitting at debtors' door so as to embarrass them into paying their debt. In some cases, the lender tied his wife, son or cattle at the door, or sat there without taking food.[14] A Marwar inscription of 1141–2 mentions the practice, using the term *kaya-vrata*.[15] In the eighteenth century such an act was known generally as *dharna* or *tukaza*, and it was deployed most frequently by creditors against debtors. The word *dharna* comes from the Sanskrit *dhri,* meaning to hold, and it meant a holding out.[16] In many cases, special protesters were employed to perform the task. They would go and sit before the alleged wrongdoer's house in a clamorous manner, advertising the grievance to the world. Timing was important; if a moment of celebration was chosen when guests would be at the house, the person or family was likely to come to an agreement much faster. The latter was held to be responsible for the upkeep of these hired protesters so long as they continued their action.[17] Vagharis, a caste of low ritual standing, used similar methods in Kathiawad. They would go in a body and sit before a house holding unused *datun* (tooth- cleaning sticks) to symbolize the fact that they had not yet eaten.[18]

Sometimes Brahmans were employed to perform dharna, as it was considered particularly shaming to cause hardship to members of this caste. In eighteenth-century Maharashtra many Brahmans made a living by hiring themselves out for this purpose.[19] They would sit at the door lamenting the wrong, appealing to the gods and abusing and cursing the wrongdoer in a loud voice. They might bring a small *murti* of a deity, to be worshipped at the same time, invoking the blessings of the deity for the protest. They might also fast, or perhaps stand with a stone placed on the head or with their topknot nailed to the wrongdoers door, so as to increase the moral pressure.[20]

A more extreme form of moral pressure could be exerted by the wronged party threatening to kill himself or herself unless the grievance was redressed. The guilt, and social opprobrium, would be seen to fall on the persons who had caused the injury or death. There is a story of a Brahman in the time of Akbar who had lent a rupee to a shepherd. The Brahman went to the shepherd and said if the rupee was not repaid he would hang himself, making the shepherd responsible for his death.[21] Mahipati likewise recounts an incident in the life of Tukaram when the saint once gave some goods on credit in the Konkan. When one of the people refused to pay him, Krishna is said to have come to Tukaram's aid. He took on the guise of Tukaram's servant and went to the debtor and threatened to hang himself, and thus disgrace the place unless the money was handed over. The neighbours pleaded with the man to relent. When the servant made preparations to hang himself, the neighbours beat the debtor and forced him to pay up.[22]

In Gujarat and Rajasthan, this form of protest was institutionalised in the practice of *traga*, which was carried on by members of the Bhat and Charan communities. They would threaten to inflict severe violence on their own bodies if their grievance was not redressed. If they were so forced to do, it was commonly believed that the person who was responsible would suffer a terrible curse. For example, when the founder of Udaipur, Maharana Udaisingh, confiscated some of the villages of the Bhats and Charans of his state in the sixteenth century, they reacted by performing acts of ritual suicide. Udaisingh was eventually forced to yield and restore their villages.[23] Bhats and Charans were able to earn a living by hiring themselves out to act as protectors of trade-caravans, travelling with them and threatening self-injury if robbers waylaid the caravan or feudal lords tried to levy excessive tolls.[24] Members of the two castes also provided security for tax demands and debts. If the money was not forthcoming they might threaten to injure or kill themselves or a family member.[25] The fear of being stigmatised as a killer of Bhats and Charans was such that few rulers were prepared to defy them openly.

The British had little sympathy for protests involving self-injury. They classified them as acts of 'blackmail' and from the late eighteenth century onwards ruled that the issuing or carrying out of such acts would be treated as a criminal offence.[26] The beliefs surrounding such protests were considered to be a mere 'ignorant superstition'.[27] Those who broke the law were punished despite strong protests by people who believed that they would suffer grave misfortune in consequence. The British claimed that the public subsequently became reconciled to the new situation when they saw that the curses of the Charans and Bhats had had no effect.[28] By 1842 the dread of traga was, according to one official, a thing of the past in Saurashtra: 'I have known several instances of lives being taken and much blood shed without the least effect being produced, whereas, at the beginning of this century a single life offered in traga would have subdued the most stubborn landholder ...'[29] These claims appear to have been over-optimistic, for as late as the 1890s a case was reported in which a Charan protested against a chief of Saurashtra by killing his old mother and daubing her blood on the chief's house. The chief, overwhelmed with guilt, refused to eat and died a few days later, 'virtually a suicide'. The Charan was arrested and later sentenced to transportation for life.[30]

The British also criminalized the practice of dharna, making it an offence under the Indian Penal Code punishable with imprisonment of up to one year and/or a fine.[31] They held that the courts of law constituted by the state should act as the sole authority in such disputes.[32] Despite this, dharna continued to be performed. In 1840 it was reported from Maharashtra that usurers were still hiring people to sit before the houses of their debtors, even though they risked being prosecuted if a complaint was made.[33] However, the colonial civil courts provided such a powerful means for usurers to exert power over their debtors that these various forms of dunning became less common during the course of the nineteenth century.[34]

Acting in these ways and others, the British redefined notions of legitimate protest. Acts involving self-privation and self-injury were deemed criminal. Forms of local disciplinary coercion against tyrannical officials—which in dhandak were considered to be means of serving a ruler by cleansing the realm of rotten elements—were treated under colonial law as criminal assault and made liable to harsh punishment. The colonial state claimed for itself a monopoly of the use of disciplinary violence of all sorts. It was able increasingly to enforce this claim as local warlords and chiefs were subjugated and the populace systematically disarmed, while at the same time it extended the power of the police into even the most remote areas. Any protest that involved violence, even of a relatively petty kind, was considered illegitimate, to be legitimately crushed with what were described as 'salutary' measures, which meant the use of an overwhelming violence, however feeble the resistance might be.

The level of violence used to suppress protest escalated considerably. This was true for both the areas under British rule and for princely states. A good example of this transition comes from Gandhi's home region of Saurashtra, where some Mahiya peasants of Junagadh state carried on a struggle against the nawab's government in the period 1872 to 1882. Previously, the Mahiyas had made a living in part through farming and in part through providing military and police services to the state. As a reward for their service, they did not have to pay land tax. The protest was launched after the state decided that it no longer required their services, so that they became liable to pay land tax. A group of Mahiyas marched on Junagadh town and proclaimed that they were seeking to restore the ancient dynasty of the Chudasma Ras. When the state police disarmed them, they retreated to a hill, where they held a dharna, stating that they would remain there until their demands were redressed. Only after much negotiation did they agree to return to their homes. The state then sought to backtrack on its promises by surveying their land and demanding that they pay the land tax. When they refused to pay, they were not however pressed. The resistance continued for several years,

and there were some stray cases of minor violence. In 1882, the British political agent—concerned by such 'lawlessness'— decided that the easy-going attitude of the nawab towards such a protest was no longer acceptable, and he demanded that it be crushed by force. Troops were sent and over eighty Mahiyas massacred.[35]

This brutal escalation of the conflict sent out a clear signal that the older forms of protest had lost their legitimacy under the new dispensation. Redress came in the end through criticism in the Bombay press of the role of the Bombay Political Agency in the affair. Embarrassed by the bad publicity, the Bombay government appointed a commission of enquiry, which led to a reduction of the tax demand by thirty percent. There was a clear lesson here: publicity was crucial to success, and that success would be made much easier if the protest did not incur any taint of 'criminality, as understood under colonial law. In effect, this meant that strict non-violence gave an edge to a protest. Because the Mahiya struggle received a lot of publicity at the time, Gandhis father— then one of the leading Indian administrators in Saurashtra—would certainly have known about the case in detail. It is probable, therefore, that Gandhi himself would have been aware of this tragic history.[36]

These concerns came to the fore in a powerful manner in the first movement that Gandhi led on his return to India from South Africa. The movement was by the peasants of Champaran district of North Bihar against white indigo planters. Earlier protests against the planters had been accompanied by a considerable degree of low-level petty violence. This had led to police repression, arrests and jail sentences. When Gandhi took over the leadership of the Champaran peasants in 1917, he insisted on strict non-violence, which, in the context of a society in which landlord violence and peasant counter-violence was an everyday fact of rural life, was a very novel idea. He brought in followers of his from Gujarat and recruited like-minded members of the local middle class to work amongst the people to ensure that there was no violence. As a result, the 1917 protest was characterised by a

much lower degree of violence than previous agitations, and it was also far more successful in achieving its aims. The satyagraha was seen throughout India as a triumph for Gandhi's methods and a shining example for others to follow.[37]

We can thus see that Gandhian non-violence provided a potent means for a legitimate and effective form of resistance within the new political order. Under Gandhian leadership the downtrodden were able to advance their cause by adopting a position of superior morality—that of non-violence—in a situation in which the rich and powerful routinely deployed forms of violence that were now, under the law, criminal acts. This allowed for an appeal to higher authority over and against the representatives of the state at the local level, who tended to connive at the extra-legal violence of superordinate groups.[38]

Gandhi similarly sought to reshape the politics of shame and honour that involved, typically, vendettas and blood feuds of a most violent type. Gandhi agreed that the preservation of honour was crucial for self-respect, stating that: 'My honour is the only thing worth preserving.'[39] This, however, was to be achieved through a non-violent refusal to cooperate, rather than through any counter-violence. In fact, it was better to accept death rather than retaliate with force.[40] He also sought to expand the question of honour beyond the realm of the family and local community or caste into a defence of the honour of the people as a whole against the state, through his campaigns of civil disobedience.[41]

He likewise reshaped the politics of dharna and traga, practices that he, like the British, condemned strongly. They were, he believed, ruled by a spirit of revenge and were violent to both spirit and body.[42] Instead, he advocated self-imposed suffering that was free from any feeling of hatred of the opponent. This might involve the taking of vows to abstain from the use of foreign cloth or liquor and the like, as well as other forms of self-imposed discipline. In his case, this included fasting, though he argued that even a

fast could be violent in intent if deployed wrongly.[43] It was best used only in cases in which the two parties knew each other personally and enjoyed a mutual respect.[44] All of this struck a chord with the popular belief that self-suffering in itself legitimised protest.

In these various ways, Gandhi forged a new language of protest for India by both building on older forms of resistance while at the same time accepting the colonial censure of all forms of violent protest. In time his new methods were to become as ritualised as the older forms of resistance. Part of their efficacy lay in the strong theoretical underpinnings that Gandhi gave to this form of protest through his doctrine of satyagraha.

Satyagraha

Satyagraha, as is often pointed out, is an amalgamation of two Gujarati words, *satya* (truth) and *agraha* (taking, seizing, holding), the implication being that one seizes hold of the truth. Gandhi equated satya with God. As he told Lanza del Vasto in 1937:

> I used to say, 'God is truth'. But some men deny God. Some are forced by their passion for truth to say that there is no God, and in their own way they are right. So now I say, 'Truth is God'. No one can say, 'Truth does not exist' without removing all truth from his statement. Therefore I prefer to say 'Truth is God'. It has taken me fifty years of persevering meditation to prefer this way of putting it to the other.[45]

Del Vasto saw this as a fundamental metaphysical breakthrough on Gandhi's part. In fact, the idea flows from the word satya itself, which in Sanskrit means true, real, actual, genuine, sincere, honest, truthful, faithful, pure, virtuous, good, successful, effectual, valid. Its root is *as*— to be, to live, to exist. It is a quality associated with a range of deities.[46] The meaning of the word was identical in Gujarati, being elaborated on in a number of popular proverbs, such as *'satya tare chhe'*—truth comes to the

surface;'*satyamev jayate'*—truth always has firm foundation; *'satyano beli Ishwar*—truth is the daughter of God. The term *satya- svarup* meant 'God, whose form is truth'.[47]

Gandhi understood that truth/satya was reached through a complex dialogue, in which reasoned argument had often to be reinforced with emotional and political pressure. He knew that, in many cases, reason by itself would not win an argument, for people tend to be swayed as much by emotion as by rational argument. This was where self-inflicted suffering, such as fasting, could be important. The large majority of Gandhi's fasts were directed against those over whom he believed he had a strong emotional bond. He never used a fast to gain political concessions from the British. He claimed that he fasted so as to make those who loved him reconsider their actions.[48] Even then, additional political pressure was often needed, entailing mass demonstrations, non-cooperation, tax refusal, *hartals* and the like.[49] During these protests, the satyagrahi had always to be open to the other side, seeking out alternatives that could satisfy both. The aim was to avoid bitterness and resolve conflict by searching for a common truth.[50] This demanded a spirit of give-and-take on both sides, for as Gandhi stated: 'all my life through, the very insistence on truth has taught me to appreciate the beauty of compromise. I saw in later life that this spirit was an essential part of satyagraha.'[51]

Gandhi resisted seeing his adversary as an enemy, insisting that in satyagraha there are no enemies. 'It is a breach of satyagraha to wish ill to an opponent or to say a harsh word to him or of him with the intention of harming him.'[52] He stated in 1937:

> I myself have always believed in the honesty of my enemies, and if one believes in it hard enough, one finds it. My enemies took advantage of my trust in them and deceived me. They deceived me eleven times running; and with stupid obstinacy, I went on believing in their honesty. With the result that, the twelfth time, they couldn't help

> keeping their word. Discovering their own honesty was a happy surprise for them and for me too. That is why my enemies and I have always parted very pleased with each other.[53]

Gandhi contrasted satyagraha with other forms of non-violent resistance, which he believed were based on an appeal to narrow self- interest and which failed to reach out to the opponent. 'It is a bad habit to say that another man's thoughts are bad and ours only are good and that those holding different views from ours are the enemies of the country.'[54] In *Hind Swaraj* he argued that many of the young extremist nationalists in India at that time adopted a needlessly hostile and disrespectful attitude to older nationalists such as Dadabhai Naoroji and Gokhale. They were even more antagonistic towards Englishmen like Hume and Wedderburn who had played a positive role in the early years of the Indian National Congress. Gandhi asserted that it was wrong to condemn them merely because they were English: 'if we shun every Englishman as an enemy, Home Rule will be delayed'.[55]

Some nationalists disliked this strong emphasis on the importance of winning over one's enemies. It was objected that such an approach could at times look suspiciously like collaboration, and it could cause suspicion among followers as to the motives of the leader. Gandhi answered that he let the results speak for themselves. It was also argued that genuine changes of heart by political opponents are rare; civil resistance succeeds mainly by bringing pressures to bear in a way that makes it hard for a regime to operate, thus forcing a stand-down.[56] Gandhi knew that this was often the case, but felt that a victory in such circumstances could only be partial. It was only when the opponent had understood the force of the counter-argument and had acted on that basis that there could be any genuine and durable success. In practice, Gandhi applied a complex mix of moral argument and nonviolent coercion (through mass protests or personal fasts), emphasising one or the other as a situation developed and changed. What

was crucial in this respect was his political skill in knowing which line to play at each twist and turn.

Individual Conscience

Gandhi always stressed that the decision as to whether or not to embark on satyagraha was a moral choice to be made consciously by each individual. Gandhi took his lead in this respect from European and American traditions in which civil resistance was understood primarily in terms of individual conscientious objection. The Quakers were well known in this respect, and Henry David Thoreau gave their principles a strong theoretical justification in his *Civil Disobedience*. Thoreau stressed that the conscience of an individual came before the will of the majority. He asserted: 'The only obligation which I have the right to assume, is to do at any time what I think is right.' He refused also to accept the legitimacy of a law with which he disagreed, even if it had been passed by a democratically elected legislature: 'Law never made men a whit more just; and, by means of their respect for it, even the well-disposed are daily made the agents of injustice.'[57] Also: 'Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also in prison.' Thoreau believed that the principled resistance of even one person could make a great difference: 'For it matters not how small the beginning may seem to be: what is once well done is done forever.'[58] Leo Tolstoy followed Thoreau in this respect. His *Writings on Civil Disobedience and Nonviolence* (which was read keenly by Gandhi) also emphasised the imperative for the individual to act according to conscience, regardless of the consequences.[59]

Thoreau and Tolstoy were aggressively individualistic; neither made any attempt to build mass movements of protest. Thoreau's protest against the poll tax in Massachusetts was waged alone, and Tolstoy for his part condemned mass organisation, as it required political work that he saw as inherently corrupting. Gandhi took a very different line; his protests sought

to build wide-ranging solidarities. He did, however, at times resort to individual protest, most notably in his fasts and in the so-called 'individual satyagraha' campaign of 1940–1.

In stressing the right of individual dissent, Gandhi followed Thoreau in refusing to accept the liberal principle that in a democracy the citizen had a duty to obey the laws of a democratically constituted legislature. He stated this principle very forcefully in *Hind Swaraj*, arguing that the British parliament danced to the tune of the executive, with members voting according to the party line regardless of their feelings in the matter. Parties were voted into power by people who were swayed by oratory and the biased opinion of the newspapers they read.[60] The parliament then passed laws which people were required to obey, however degrading they might be. 'That we should obey laws whether good or bad is a new-fangled notion.'[61]

> It is a superstition and ungodly thing to believe that an act of a majority binds a minority. Many examples can be given in which acts of majorities will be found to have been wrong and those of minorities to have been right. All reforms owe their origin to the initiatives of minorities in opposition to majorities ... So long as the superstition that men should obey unjust laws exists, so long will their slavery exist. And a passive resister alone can remove such a superstition.[62]

In this, Gandhi did not agree with Tagore's argument that civil resistance was a worse form of authoritarianism, as it involved a vocal minority imposing its will on a passive majority. Neither did he accept the contention of the liberal politician Chimanlal Setalvad that 'if you inculcate in the minds of the younger generation the idea of direct action, the ideas of disobeying laws, what will happen to your Swaraj when you get it?'[63] Gandhi countered by arguing that his aim was to build a democracy in which satyagraha could be used against an authoritarian state, as well as 'mobocracy'. Through satyagraha, the people could provide a check on parliament. Respectful obedience to the law should be the norm, but it

remained a citizen's duty to discern bad and unjust laws and to disobey them if necessary. Satyagraha was a highly democratic weapon, as women as well as men, those without arms as well as the physically weak could all use it. All that was required was a courageous commitment to a cause.[64]

Gandhi always held that participation in any satyagraha was a matter of individual choice and that it was wrong in principle to use pressure to force people to protest against their will. In this, he distanced himself from the majority of nationalists, who had no qualms about deploying community and caste sanctions to ensure solidarity. This was a marked feature of the swadeshi movement in Bengal between 1905 and 1909.[65] Aurobindo Ghose had made such sanctions a keystone of his programme of nationalist struggle, India being a country 'in which the people are more powerfully swayed by the fear of social excommunication and the general censure of their fellows than by the written law'.[66] Ranajit Guha has argued that such sanctions represented 'the clay that nationalism itself was made of', and that this was true even after Gandhi assumed the leadership of the movement.[67] Despite his frequent strictures, Gandhi found that he could not swim against the tide. All he could do ultimately was to insist that caste sanctions and boycotts be applied non-violently.[68]

The problem in this respect was that individual freedom counted for little in a society in which the large majority of people were not considered to have a moral presence separate from that of the kinship or community group. If on the one hand this provided a basis for solidarity—as Partha Chatterjee has emphasised in his discussion of the 'communal mode of power'[69]—it also created the conditions for oppression, particularly of women. In standing out against such a mindset through his stress on the right of individual self-determination, Gandhi was demanding that swaraj be rooted in a very different modality of power, that of individual conscience. As he stressed: 'No society can possibly be built on a denial of individual freedom.'[70] It is clear that India, in common with many other

societies, has yet to achieve this ideal, given that powerful social and political leaders habitually apply sanctions and frequent violence against citizens who assert their right to social or ritual equality or freedom of religious belief.

However, as Rammanohar Lohia once argued, what is most important is that Gandhi taught people that, however humble, low and powerless they may appear to be, they had the power in themselves to resist, and that this resistance was entirely legitimate. 'This enabling the individual to resist oppression by himself and without any support is, to my mind, the greatest quality of Mahatma Gandhi's action and life.'[71]

Ahimsa

Gandhi's non-violence (*ahimsa*) represented a creative adaptation of various philosophies of non-violence. As Bondurant has pointed out, ahimsa is valorised strongly in the Hindu tradition. She claims that the aphorism found in the Mahabharata: *ahimsa paramo dharmah* (nonviolence is the greatest religion or duty) is 'known in every village in India'.[72] It is particularly important in Jainism, in which it constitutes the first vow, and it is frequently argued that Gandhi's non-violence was rooted in his experience of Jainism in early life. It is certainly true that Jains sought to practice a most rigorous form of non-violence in their careful avoidance of taking of life, however small and seemingly insignificant. There was however a certain formulaic coldness to the logic of their non-violence which Gandhi found unattractive. Thus, Jain Baniyas could be scrupulous about not harming insects, but treat their fellow human beings with calculating cruelty in matters of business. As a Marwari proverb put it most succinctly:

> Oh Baniya! Nobody knows your doings. Although you do not drink water without straining and sifting it [to ensure that there are no insects in it], you sip the blood of your clients without reserve.[73]

Gandhi's non-violence was, by contrast, rooted in altruism and compassion towards fellow humans. He stated in 1915 that non-violence involved qualities such as *daya, akrodh,* and *aman*.[74] In Gujarati, daya meant, according to a dictionary of 1904, pity, compassion, commiseration, mercy, clemency, sympathy, tenderness. This quality was central to Gandhi's understanding of ahimsa. As he said in 1932: 'We can describe compassion as the concrete expression of *ahimsa*.'[75] Akrodh found no place in this dictionary, only akrodhi, an adjective meaning not passionate, habitually abstaining from anger.[76] Aman was from an Arabic word meaning security, and in this context meant essentially peace'. The general thrust of Gandhi's injunction was that ahimsa involved qualities of respect and sympathy for the opponent, freedom from anger, and a desire for peace.

Gandhi's non-violence was influenced also by the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and by certain traditions of Christian dissent. Mainstream Christian practice had little to contribute on the subject of non-violent resistance, conforming as it generally did to the Pauline doctrine that Christians were obliged to obey civil authority. A number of dissenting sects had refused to accept this principle, notably the Quakers, who believed firmly in the principle of non-violence and non-violent resistance to unjust laws. In America they established a tradition of conscientious objection along principled non-violent lines. They saw this, however, as a matter of individual conscience and there was no involvement in any mass struggles.[77]

These various influences fed into Gandhi's own understanding of ahimsa. He held that as none could know the absolute truth, nobody had a right to commit violence on others lest they be in the wrong. An individual's truth should be asserted 'not by infliction of suffering on the opponent but on one's self.'[78] He believed that one had to be very strong in oneself to be able to practise ahimsa with success. To be nonviolent out of weakness was no more than cowardice: 'It is not conceived as a weapon of the weak.'[79] He stated that it was better to resist violently than act in a cowardly manner.[80]

He praised the violent resistance of the Polish people to Hitler in 1939, as he recognised that non-violence was not an option for them.[81]

In the context of colonial rule in India, non-violent resistance made strong tactical sense, for it wrong-footed the British, putting them on the defensive. Until then they had been able to counter what was normally the petty violence of protesters with a ruthless use of their superior gunpower. Faced with non-violence they were left in a quandary, as their counter-violence merely served to reveal the moral bankruptcy of their rule. A few British officials even resigned their positions so as to spare themselves from having to sanction violence against unarmed and non-violent crowds.[82] In this respect, Gandhi's insistence on complete non-violence was critical in achieving a moral advantage for nationalists.

In general, the debate on Gandhian non-violence tends to focus on its applicability as an absolute value. It is often argued that non-violence was all very well against opponents with a moral conscience, but useless against an enemy without qualms. Nelson Mandela, for example— who was in other respects a great admirer of Gandhi—felt that nonviolence could not succeed in South Africa against a white regime which was not prepared to accept the morality of the struggle for democratic rights, and which was prepared to use the most violent and murderous means to suppress it. As Mandela later wrote: 'Non-violent passive resistance is effective as long as your opponent adheres to the same rules as you do. But if peaceful protest is met with violence, its efficacy is at an end.'[83] Gandhi did not accept this sort of critique—there was, he held, no human without some form of moral conscience, and even the Nazis might be made to yield. As he stated in this context in 1938: 'The hardest metal yields to sufficient heat.'[84] Dennis Dalton, otherwise a strong admirer of Gandhi, feels that Gandhi betrayed a grave ignorance of the situation under such a totalitarian regime. In Nazi Germany, even the slightest dissidence was crushed, with arrests in the dead of night and instant executions or incarceration in concentration camps in

such a way that the population as a whole remained in ignorance. He feels that Gandhi discredited himself by advocating civil resistance when it had no chance of the slightest success. Satyagraha can only succeed when the government is ambivalent, as was the case in India and in Western democracies. In situations in which rulers are prepared to eliminate many of their citizens to remain in power, it cannot work.[85]

Dalton argues that Gandhi did not know enough about the situation in Nazi Germany to be able to suggest any effective strategies for those who were oppressed by the state. Instead he made absurd suggestions, such as that the Jews should come out *en masse* and be prepared to die in public. This is a valid point—Gandhi would have done better if he had not made specific suggestions in cases in which he had a poor grasp of the complexities of the situation. There is, however, evidence that the Nazi war effort was hampered considerably over the years by civil resistance in the occupied countries. In Norway there was particularly strong opposition of this sort to the Quisling government. The military theorist Basil Liddel Hart interviewed German officers after the war; they said that they had found it much harder to deal with non-violent civilian resistance than guerrilla warfare.[86] Even within Nazi Germany, there are examples of successful resistance. In February 1943 the Gestapo arrested all of the Jews remaining in Berlin, about two thousand of whom had non-Jewish spouses. These spouses, who were mostly women, staged a protest outside the prison where the Jews were held. The police dispersed them, threatening to open fire, but they regrouped time and again over the next week. In the end, fearing the impression that the protest might have on other 'Aryans', the authorities backed down and released the Jews.[87] Elsewhere, many ruthless dictatorships have been undermined as a result of mass protest by unarmed civilians, such as those of the Shah in Iran (1979), Marcos in the Philippines (1986), Pinochet in Chile (1989), Ceausescu in Romania (1989) and Milosevic in Yugoslavia (2000).

In modern India, the issue of non-violence as against violence has been debated in recent years within the Naxalite movement in Bihar. This brings out the strong logic there is for a non-violent strategy within the modern polity. In the early stages, in the late 1960s and 1970s, the chief emphasis in the Naxalite movement was on the violent elimination of notorious landlords. The latter countered by organising their own private armies, which sought to instil terror in the people through massacres of low-caste and Dalit peasants who supported the Naxalites. The Naxalites replied with counter-massacres of high-caste people. There was a tendency for the violence to feed on itself, with one attack being revenged by another, as in a blood feud. In some cases, Naxalites began to recruit help from bandits and criminals to help them in their work. When some Naxalite groups decided to try to escape this cycle of violence by moving towards open mass campaigns, the groups that condemned this move as 'revisionist' carried out murderous attacks on members and supporters of the rival groups.

The movement thus split into different tendencies, with those who followed the line of open mass struggle soon emerging the stronger. Besides participating in elections, groups such as the CPI (ML) Liberation and Party Unity have organised mass protests to gain land for their supporters, and fought the landlords through demonstrations, protest marches, strikes, blockades and the like. In the process, their low-caste and Dalit supporters have felt empowered in a way that was not the case when the movement had focused on underground guerrilla activity. This does not mean that its aims have been achieved, for the landlords are still very strong and enjoy state support, and problems of poverty and exploitation are still acute in rural Bihar.[88] Also, the Naxalites have ignored many areas of constructive work of a Gandhian sort, such as campaigns to educate the poor and build a culture of economic self-help in the villages. However, the fact that they are now accountable to their supporters means that Naxalite cadres have an interest in addressing such issues as well.[89]

In Andhra Pradesh the Peoples War Group has opened up an internal debate on this matter. In 1998 the leaders called for a process of 'remorseful introspection' on the issue of violence. It was felt that too frequently violence had been deployed in ways that were counter-productive. As a result, a document was circulated to cadres setting out new guidelines in this respect.[90] A new human rights organisation was established in India in February 2000—the People's Union for Human Rights—which called on militants everywhere to adopt a more critical attitude towards their use of violence. As Javed Anand has argued: 'Put bluntly, do groups and organisations whose rights we defend themselves believe in democratic forms of mass mobilisation? Is it ethically right and politically tenable that rights groups focus their entire attention on violations by state personnel but remain mum when "militants" maim, rape or kill fellow citizens.'[91] There was a sharp reaction to this by many in the civil rights movement, who argued that it was wrong to equate the violence of the militants with that of the state, and in fact this was the very argument deployed by the state to absolve itself from blame.[92] The debate continues, but it seems that the critique of the 'excessive violence' of the early Naxalites has been having an impact on even the most hardened armed activists.[93]

Satyagraha Within the Indian Polity

The techniques of civil resistance developed by Gandhi rapidly became a central feature of Indian politics, providing a strong counter to the power of the colonial state. It followed its own rituals, with marches, flag-hoisting, and symbolic violations of selected laws, and fasting. As early as 1921, the Sikh Akalis decided to deploy satyagraha in their demand for popular control over Sikh temples. The leaders of this protest, following Gandhi, insisted that there be complete non-violence, and, as if to refute most strikingly that colonial stereotype of the hotheaded and 'martial' Sikh, this rule was complied with to a remarkable degree.[94] There was a similar

upturning of a stereotype when the Pukhtuns of the North West Frontier Province launched a series of non-violent satyagrahas under the leadership of Abdul Ghaffar Khan.[95] Satyagraha also became a means for protest by depressed groups against their Indian exploiters, as in the protest at Vaikam in Kerala in 1924–5, when Untouchables demanded the right to use a road running past a temple.

Even groups who were politically opposed to Gandhi and the Indian National Congress adopted the weapon of satyagraha. For example, the radical Tamil leader Periyar E.V. Ramasamy had learnt the techniques of Gandhian resistance at Vaikam, but subsequently broke with Gandhi in 1925 because of his refusal to endorse the principle of separate representation for the depressed classes and because he continued to valorise *varnashrama dharma* and Brahmanism. In 1926, he founded the Self Respect Movement. In 1937 he organised strong protests against the Congress plan to make Hindi compulsory in Tamil schools, and he ended up in jail as a result. Despite its opposition to the Gandhian Congress, the movement existed within the political space that had been opened up by Gandhi.[96]

Satyagraha has continued to be a central element within the Indian polity since independence in 1947, again deployed by all sorts of groups and political parties. We can see this in the ritual of the public fast, a form of protest that is taken very seriously by those in authority. This is in marked contrast to the attitude of politicians elsewhere, such as Margaret Thatcher, who felt no qualms about allowing Bobby Sands and nine other Irish nationalist hunger strikers to die in agony in 1981, stating that she would not be 'blackmailed' by terrorists.[97] This harsh reaction was viewed with horror and disbelief in India, where such moral courage is widely respected. Indian political leaders have had to adopt a very different attitude towards political fasting. To take some examples at random, when Indira Gandhi refused to give a date for fresh elections in Gujarat in 1975—even a year after the state assembly had been dissolved—Morarji Desai launched a fast unto death. Six days into the fast, Indira Gandhi agreed to allow the

elections to be held.[98] A year later, Vinoba Bhave demanded a total ban on cow slaughter, and announced that he would go on a fast until the government accepted it. The governments of Andhra, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Kerala, West Bengal and Assam promptly announced that they would ban cow- slaughter. Vinoba Bhave then withdrew his threat and publicly thanked Indira Gandhi.[99] In some cases fasting merges with mass protest. For example in 1991, 250 residents of Ralegan Siddhi (Ahmadnagar District, Maharashtra) led by the social worker Anna Hazare went on fast after the government failed to grant recognition to their village school. Within hours, the authorities backed down and recognised the school.[100]

In all these various ways, Gandhi has provided a strong institutional base for the expression of dissent within the modern Indian polity. Its power has, if anything, grown, for in a time of rapid electronic communication a matter which might appear to be of only local concern may be turned through satyagraha into an issue of national, and even international, importance. Through satyagraha, many have come to believe that they have the strength to exert a counter-power against those in authority. Satyagraha thus provides a means through which—to use the language of the new social movements —the personal is made political.