

Swaraj and the Quest for Freedom: Rabindranath Tagore's Critique of Gandhi's Non-Cooperation*

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Freedom is an idea of distinctly western origins. The word 'west' signifies an exceptional fact. It is a fact unlike any other in the long and varied human past. The question of the origin of this fact, as perhaps of all human facts, is implicated in a paradox of grave complexity. Origins of its definitive substance lie well beyond what is recognised as the geographical-cultural locus of the West. Yet, its self-sense is cast in severe contrast to the non-West. And it stands very close to being the sovereign fact for human existence: past, present and future.

Coercive power of technological control and armed conquest has been crucial in making possible the sovereign reach of the West. But sovereignalness of the West abides from a ground that is etched far deeper, and beyond the reach of mere coercive power. And perhaps no word could express as neatly the nature and salience of that ground as the word Freedom. It is a word that arises in deep ambivalence and unfolds with a certain ineradicable irony.

The idea of Freedom in India was mediated by colonial conquest. Prior to the 19th century the word 'Freedom' would have made little sense in India, or in any other country outside Europe. In the world beyond Europe, the historical connection between the fact of conquest and the ideal of Freedom has been felt as inseparable. The searing irony implicit in this fact runs perhaps infinitely deeper. The very origins of the idea and ideal of Freedom are steeped in the long historical experience and acceptance of slavery and feudal servitude as large social facts.

The word *swaraj*, literally self-rule, signifies a statement concerning Freedom from quite another kind of vantage. From its very first utterance the ideal of *swaraj* was invoked as the negation of conquest and collective political servitude. The general understanding of this invocation has been in terms of what Orlando Patterson designates as 'sovereign freedom'. In ordinary English it would translate as the ideal of an independent nation state. And that is essentially the sense which informs the various anti-colonial struggles for Freedom.

The debate between the Poet Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi

on *swaraj* and *swadeshi* which this paper seeks to focus upon, is perhaps unique in this context. The struggle for freedom from colonial rule in India and everywhere else seemed to implicitly accept the idea of Freedom in terms of its enunciation in western civilisation. Within this implicit general acceptance there have been of course sharp differences. For instance, Mao and M.N. Roy insisted that the mainstream bourgeois notion of Freedom was severely limited and inherently flawed. And Jawaharlal Nehru, would more or less affirm with a few qualifications at the level of detail, the mainstream bourgeois idea of Freedom. What then constitutes the distinctive substance of the Gandhi-Tagore debate on *swaraj*?

To clarify the distinctive cognitive ground from whence the Tagore-Gandhi debate was voiced, consider the following proposition. Technology, as a continually evolving mediation between Man and Nature, constitutes the essential and formative basis of universality and human freedom. This proposition could be said to mark out the cardinal line of agreement shared by political voices as sharply opposed as Mao and Nehru, or M.N. Roy and V.D. Savarkar. Differences among them, fierce and not unimportant, concerned the perceived requirement for actualising that mediation. The morphology of agreement and differences in this context refer to the kind of primacy and relationship that was posited for the cluster of three elements that comprise the idea of Freedom: sovereign, civic, and individual freedoms.

M.N. Roy, a staunch warrior of Socialist Revolution, would posit 'sovereign freedom' as the fulcrum for the making of a new civic society. Talk of 'individual freedom' would strike him as subversive in the difficult phase of making a new civic society. Savarkar, a staunch warrior of *Hindutva*, would also posit 'sovereign freedom' as the fulcrum for the making of a new Hindu society. To him also, talk of 'individual freedom' would seem subversive in the difficult phase of making a new Hindu society. The sharp disagreement between them stemmed from their different perception of the possible lines of coherence and cohesion in the modern situation. For M.N. Roy, class signified the only possible line of coherence. Savarkar posited instead, shared memory of myth and history as the enduring line for coherence. For both of them however, decisive battle against 'the other' signified the moment of true self-recognition and a new beginning. Nehru in this context stands at a perceptible remove. For him, 'sovereign freedom' could never acquire historic force in the absence of 'civic and individual freedom'.

The Tagore-Gandhi debate on *swaraj* and *swadeshi* was occasioned by a tactical question of momentous consequence: boycott and burning of foreign cloth. But clearly it would be a mistake to see it essentially as a debate about the tactics of struggle against colonial rule. Bitter tactical debates have been frequent enough among partisans of anti-colonial struggles. The abiding significance of this debate flows from its genuine concern for the idea of Freedom, as also its sense of profound unease with the idea of Freedom

enunciated in the West. The fact that such a debate could take place in the very hour as it were, of decisive combat exemplifies Gandhi's unique mode of battle and cognition. Even in the most critical moments, it provided legitimate space for conversation and debate.

Gandhi announced the decision to offer *satyagraha* on 24th February 1919. The immediate objective was to resist the Rowlatt Act which imposed stringent restrictions on civic freedom. Protests, meetings and a massive campaign to enrol signatories to the '*satyagraha* pledge' followed. The feverish intensity of the response surprised the Imperial rulers and their Native subjects alike. Unruly crowds attacked and burnt Government property. Railway lines were uprooted and telegraph wires shredded in several parts of India. To curb the mass upsurge the British rulers used brutal force. Some Europeans were attacked and killed by frenzied mobs. Several towns in Punjab were taken over by unruly crowds reviving thereby buried memories of another '1857' like situation.

Tagore felt acutely distressed by the course of events. His first concern was the conduct of Indians. He first voiced his grave apprehensions about the use of *satyagraha* in a letter to Gandhi written on 12th April, 1919 just a day before the massacre of hundreds of unarmed people at a public meeting in Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar. The very first line cautioned that power 'in all its forms is irrational'. Worse, power as it becomes effective nurtures dangerous 'temptation'. And 'resistance', like all 'forms of power', could be used 'against truth as well as for it'.

The next two years aggravated Tagore's sense of unease. Gandhi's call for non-cooperation with British rule aroused tremendous expectations. So many accepted Gandhi's promise of *swaraj* within a year as literal truth. Tagore spoke of his dark fears about what non-cooperation was doing and could do to India in three intense and meditative letters, and in an article entitled 'The Call of Truth'. He began by affirming the rare quality of Gandhi's presence. Here was a man 'frail in body and devoid of material resources', stirring to life the 'immense power of the meek'. In him, Tagore sensed 'truth at last'. And not just as a 'quotation out of a book', but as a living force making 'visible' to all of us the sheer 'power of truth'. This truth for Tagore was also the truth which defined the definitive inner core of Indian civilisation. For the 'idea of India' rejects neat 'separateness' from 'others'. And hence it is that India has 'ever declared that Unity is Truth, and separateness is *maya*'.

The 'idea of non-cooperation', argued Tagore, signified an intense form of 'political asceticism'. Unlike the degrading politics of petitions and entreaties which characterised the earlier phase of National politics, non-cooperation demanded 'sacrifice'. But this sacrifice was in the service of 'negation'. At its root lies the unthinking 'joy of annihilation'. Sacrifice in the absence of affirmation is forever on the brink of 'frightfulness'; the loss of 'faith in the basic reality of normal life'. It could only usher in 'the anarchy of mere emptiness'. The fire of non-cooperation was not the fire of

'our hearth', but the fire that was bound to extinguish 'our hearth and home'. Non-cooperation in seeking *swaraj* only for India served merely to enhance 'organisations of National Egoism'. What is this *swaraj*, asked the poet. And he answered: 'It is *maya*'. A mere illusion, which in time would 'vanish' like the 'mist'. 'Nation' is a word unknown in 'our language'. It does not touch India's innermost truth. For that truth gives voice to the 'power of the immortal spirit' and beckons us towards the 'freedom of the sky' wherein not just India, but all Mankind would 'find his *swaraj*'.

While speaking of non-cooperation, Tagore assigns to the word *swaraj* a sharply restricted semantic function. In Tagore's usage *swaraj* is reduced to merely denote political independence, political organisation and nationhood. Whereas Gandhi always insisted that *swaraj* could not be equated with mere political self-governance. True *swaraj* required as much the availability of self-rule for the individual and for varied forms mediating between the individual and the nation. Tagore was aware of that. In positing a restricted semantic focus to *swaraj*, he was clearly guided by prevalent usage and the general understanding of the word.

The definitive concern of Tagore was to keep in good order the social realm as the primal reality. For the fatal flaw of the modern West, according to Tagore, was its insistence on the finality of the 'political' form. It was subversive of harmony between the 'inner' and the 'outer' life of Man. In the absence of that harmony human freedom was inconceivable. And non-cooperation, in positing the 'political' form as the supreme objective was pushing India towards that very suicidal path.

Tagore's argument unfolds across several levels. The connecting link between them is not always clear and, these levels subsist in certain tension. But a cardinal line does run through them. That line could be indicated as his critique of specialisation. Tagore believed that the political form signified a case of obsessive and ultimately suicidal specialisation.

The political form, Tagore knew, is a human artefact of immense power. The mighty modern world had been cast, as it were, through it. Its power stems from the capacity to order human life in terms of specialised functions; as technology and as organisation. But this dazzling achievement is anchored in a fragile accomplishment. The political form as the most extreme expression of specialisation is driven by greed to control and accumulate ever more things. The belief that this play could go on indefinitely was a dangerous illusion. The final limits to that play inhere in the very make-up of the human condition.

In Nature, 'parasites' embody the specialised form to perfection. They do not have to work for their food. It is available to them 'readymade'. But they 'pay' for this privilege by 'losing the power of assimilating food in its natural form'. It is a gain that entails loss of basic vitality. To 'fatten' on the 'toil' of others is the most obvious form of 'parasitical' behaviour. Far less obvious but infinitely more frequent form of parasitical behaviour is for Man to become so completely 'rejected' in a 'set of outside conditions' as to virtually

relinquish the autonomy of the 'inner self'.

Another kind of specialised form in Nature is exemplified by the honey bee. The cell of the beehive has attained a 'certain perfection'. Its form has remained unchanged over millions of years. As such it signifies the perfect instance of precise mechanical production. In both forms specialisation confers a decisive advantage; optimal use of what is available in the world outside. And in both forms, specialisation entails acceptance of the 'outside' world as the final arbiter of what life can be.

But the human presence signifies, in the words of Tagore, 'a sudden accession of creative courage'. In terms of physical prowess, the 'human creature' came forth 'weak and defenceless'. What marked him out from the very beginning as exceptional and unique, was the power of his 'inward freedom' to refuse to accept the 'rule of things' as they happen to be. Hence that ineluctable human stirring towards freedom; 'from the obvious to the hidden, from the easy to the difficult, from parasitism to self-determination, from the slavery to his passions to the mastery of himself'.

Parasite and the honey bee as metaphors encode for Tagore the two impulses ineradicable in specialisation; acceptance of the rule of things as they happen to be, and mechanical replication. And ironically, Tagore was convinced that these impulses possessed both Gandhi's idea of non-cooperation and the idea of the nation which had made Europe the master of the world. In Tagore's mode of exposition, one could speak of this as the paradox of two journeys which commence in two opposite directions only to converge in the same 'anarchy of emptiness'.

Gandhi's advocacy of the *charkha* (spinning wheel) and burning of foreign cloth was pushing India, in the words of Tagore, on the terrible path of senseless 'rites' and 'repetition'. It is a call to 'narrowness', 'mechanical repetition' and regimented 'uniformity'. For the 'small machines' could 'stunt' man as much as 'big machines'. In the 'wrong place', all machines big or small, would induce suicidal specialisation. In India, that has invariably taken the form of Man being reduced to labour in the likeness of a 'machine'. Gandhi's valorisation of manual labour infuriated Tagore. Against Gandhi's invocation of the 'dignity' of manual labour, Tagore posited, what he felt to be the 'cry' of humanity in all civilisations and in all ages, against the 'indignity' of repetitive mechanical labour.

Perhaps what troubled Tagore most acutely was the compulsion entailed in Gandhi's non-cooperation for all Indians to do exactly the same thing. And *charkha* encapsulated in its repetitive movements within inflexible parameters, the 'anti-life' logic of 'levelling' the varied nuances of human temperament and life into barren monotony. Success of non-cooperation required fierce regimentation enforced by 'mass hysteria' of unthinking crowds in a state of perpetual frenzy. It was not unlike the desperate swagger of mean demagogues threatening to 'drown the English', if only all Indians could be made to spit in unison. Surely there is nothing in it for the eternal call of India: 'Let all seeker after Truth come from all sides'. The call to

boycott and spin harkens, cautioned Tagore, to that failed dark semitic dream 'to bring mankind together on the basis of the common worship of a common Deity'.

The journey of the West proceeds through a different route. Tagore perceived in it the working out in an opposite direction of the same anti-life logic of specialisation. Unlike the mechanical repetitiveness of stagnation in India, the western journey is marked by mechanical repetitiveness of ceaseless movement towards ever more efficient and powerful forms of organisation. The virtual reduction in India of Man into a machine distressed Tagore. In that Tagore perceived the most demeaning truth about India. An equally demeaning fact of the modern West has been the virtual displacement of Man by the machine. India exemplifies the acceptance of the 'rule of things' as they have always been. And the West exemplifies acceptance of the 'rule of things' forever on the march. In India, this acceptance bred passive submission to degradation and oppression. In the West, that very acceptance bred insatiable 'greed' and the passion for conquest and 'self-aggrandisement' without limit. True, this acceptance had made the West the master of the world. But so long as the West failed to master its 'greed', it would remain a slave to the 'rule of things'. And it made no difference that the 'rule of things' comprised in the case of the West a form forever mobile. In both the stagnant 'East' and the progressive 'West', the natural relationship between the 'inner-self' and the world 'outside' had been inverted. The world 'outside' had come to be the arbiter of the 'inner-self', and thereby, also of significance and value. 'Outside' as the arbiter of value and significance negates human autonomy, which in the vision of Tagore could never be an artefact shaped in History. Human autonomy expressed the ineradicable impulse of 'inner-life'; that profound 'possibility' inherent in the human presence.

Gandhi's response to Tagore's formidable indictment is sketched out in three articles published in *Young India*. The first article, 'The Poet's Anxiety' (June 1, 1921) was published, it seems, in response to Tagore's letters. The second article, 'The Great Sentinel' (Oct. 13, 1921) was in response to Tagore's 'The Call of Truth' published in *Modern Review* (Oct. 1921). The third article, 'The Poet and the Charkha' (Nov. 5, 1925) was in response to Tagore's 'The Cult of the Charkha' in the *Modern Review* (Sept. 1925).

The titles and dates of Gandhi's response are perhaps of some significance. The point is not that Gandhi was exceedingly prompt in responding to Tagore's apprehensions about non-cooperation. If it were just that, it would have signified no more than a sharp tactical sense about the possible political fall-out from Tagore's scathing intervention. Gandhi was not in the least anxious about the possible use of Tagore's indictment by, say, the British rulers. What stands foremost in Gandhi's response is the quiet passion to engage with what he perceived as the critical edge in Tagore's argument.

In each instance, Gandhi begins by acknowledging the Poet's rare depth

of commitment to India as it has been and as it could be. The Poet's anxiety, Gandhi affirmed, stems from his 'exquisite jealousy of India's honour'. He is therefore anxious that India never delivers to the world a 'false or feeble message'. He is the 'Sentinel' who would never be silenced by the might or prestige of authority. He would always stand up for 'Truth and Reason'. That acknowledgement demarcated the shared ground between them, and not just in the sense of an emotional anchorage but in terms of a shared cognitive terrain. Like Tagore, Gandhi knew that one's past had to be owned and engaged with in its entirety, along with all its unbearable ugliness.

Gandhi also recognised, and in poetic clarity, the difference and the distance which caused the argument. The Poet lived in the 'magnificent world' of ideas. He is the grand 'inventor' who 'creates, destroys and recreates'. But it had not been given to Gandhi to pursue that rare call. All that was given to him was to be an 'explorer'; a 'slave of somebody else's creation'. It was the unique privilege of the Poet to make 'his *gopis* dance' to tunes of his creation. As an 'explorer', the utmost that Gandhi could do was to 'cling' to whatever precious he could find in a world that had been given to him. He had no choice but to work with and through flawed and fragile artefacts. So it is that he must 'cling' to the 'worn out' *charkha*. It was not his intention to make the *charkha* into the One and only True God. The utmost that he sought in the 'laborious struggle' for *charkha* was to find for it a 'little corner'. For he believed that through it would show the 'hidden possibilities' for Truth as it subsists and could be in the everyday struggles of living. His journey was not in worship of the *charkha*, but to seek deliverance through it, of his 'Sita' from the 'ten-headed monster from Japan, Manchester, Paris etc.'

Like the Poet, Gandhi would not accept things simply because they were so given. He also would not accept the 'rule of things' to be the final arbiter of values and human worth. For Gandhi as for Tagore, the touchstone of value and human worth had to be 'Truth and Reason'. But unlike the Poet, Gandhi was convinced that in human living as it has been and even as it could be at its best, Truth could never be secured by its mere invocation. True, it is given to very few to be able to voice the Truth. But affirmation of Truth has to traverse a realm of quite another kind wherein the beauty and power of Truth does abide, but almost always fragile and implicated. Truth well voiced may dazzle and enthral us all like 'Solomon arrayed in all his glory'. But perhaps in the final reckoning, cautioned Gandhi, that glory would wilt before the one of 'lilies of the field'.

Gandhi's simile of 'lilies of the field' refers to the enduring force of natural beauty as also the fragility inherent in sustaining truth in the midst of everyday life. Affirmation of Truth had therefore to be an act of cultivation which required 'daily use' of the 'weeding fork' as much as 'sowing'. Non-cooperation was just that weeding fork. For it could only be directed towards one's self. It signified India's 'withdrawal' unto itself against the 'armed imposition' of 'compulsory cooperation' with 'modern methods of

exploitation'. Non-cooperation was not directed against the English, but against a civilisation which placed such enormous value on the capacity of 'one country to prey upon another'.

The refusal to co-operate on the terms of a civilisation which, in the words of Gandhi, had made of 'exploitation of non-European races a religion' stemmed from concerns that reached out well beyond India. *Swadeshi* and *satyagraha* were not an 'exclusive doctrine'. They arise from a concern for the entire world. But if one is to husband 'lilies of the field' one must begin with the field in which one is placed. An India 'prostrate at the feet of Europe' could have nothing to share 'save her degradation'. Before India could think of 'sharing with the world', she must learn to 'possess'. For if India is to truly 'aspire to die for humanity', she must first 'learn to live' in dignity.

Gandhi conceded that there would always lurk hidden dangers in the commitment of love, even if that be to 'lilies of the field'. One would always be tempted to mistake love for the 'field' as 'love of lilies'. He knew that 'blind surrender to love is often more mischievous than a forced surrender to the lash of the tyrant'. Love sustains the 'weak'. But it could degenerate into a slavery of exclusion. There is always 'hope for the slave' to brute force, but none for the slave of 'love'. Hence the compelling relevance of the Poet's warning against the frenzy of 'slavishly mimicking' the call of non-cooperation and *charkha*.

But the poet was clearly mistaken, argued Gandhi, in representing the 'doctrine of non-cooperation' as the logic of pure negation. It could well be that India was not prepared to bear in adequate measure the difficult requirements entailed in the 'doctrine' and practice of *satyagraha*. If that be so, 'India and the world' would have to 'wait'. But *satyagraha* was the only choice for India and the world to a cycle of 'violence' and 'revenge', which the modern system of 'exploitation' of weaker countries was certain to unleash.

Pure affirmation was inconceivable. Even the enunciation of Truth, in Indian traditions as also in other religious traditions, had never been free of negation. The Poet was mistaken in contrasting the *upanishadic* concept of *mukti* (emancipation) as pure affirmation of *ananda* (bliss) with the pure negation of Buddhistic *nirvana* (extinction). And Gandhi concluded that it could not be an accident that the 'final word of the Upanishads (*Brahmavidya*) is *Not*'.

Affirmation of Truth in everyday realm of living, Gandhi clarified, required a 'series of eternal rejections and acceptances'. Rejections like the one non-cooperation seeks to enforce, which encompass large areas of life have to be undertaken with care and in continual vigilance. Such rejections create battle-like situations. Extremity of the situation alone can justify battle-like efforts. India in the shadow of 'conquest' and 'modern machines', was like a 'house on fire'. At such a moment, if normal life is to recover and sustain, activities of normal life had to be suspended so that all effort could

be harnessed to 'quench the fire'.

Precisely this imperative of having to posit a single supreme objective for India, with all its variety of human temperament and cultural disposition, had caused the Poet terrible anxiety. For he felt that such a demand is bound to induce mindless conformity in the service of unification at the lowest common denominator. He perceived in it the logic of 'pure negation' at work against the natural diversity of normal life. Thus one could speak of Tagore's sweeping indictment of non-cooperation and *charkha*, and almost in his words, as symbolic of the sovereignty of the 'outer' over 'inner-life', of 'matter' over 'spirit', of 'slavish submission' over spontaneous 'freedom in normal life', and of 'West' over the 'East'.

Gandhi's response to this is in terms of what he reckoned as the inherence and logic of difference and diversity. In nature as in life, beneath the 'magnificent and kaleidoscopic variety' there also subsists a grand 'unity of purpose, design and form'. True, 'no two men' are ever 'absolutely alike'. Yet, in the 'commonness' of human form the same life pulsates in all of them. It is a thought etched deep in India. Shankara in declaring that the staggering variety of *namarupa* (name and form) was *maya* (illusion) and the only true reality was *Brahman*, carried this profound sense of 'sameness or oneness' to its 'utmost logical and natural limit'. Gandhi was absolutely clear that it was not for him or for anyone else to ever enforce that declaration in the actual living of human life. He wished merely to affirm that 'sameness and identity' cohere in the life of individuals and civilisations in intimate distance with 'multiplicity and variety'.

At this point one could ask with Tagore the question, as to the point and conditions under which affirmation of coherence becomes an argument against freedom and self-rule (*swaraj*). Could one accept, for instance, the smallness of the machine (*charkha*) which Gandhi sought to make the principal instrument of India's deliverance, as proof against its possible misuse?

Gandhi's first proposition to this crucial part of the argument is a categorical rejection of the idea that the size or the efficiency of a machine could ever by itself be a signifier of freedom. 'Freedom' and 'self-determination' could have meaning only in relation to 'the soul' and the human 'intellect'. And therefore, he chose to be 'indifferent' to the question whether the 'steel age' represents an 'advance upon the flint age'. He conceded the 'possibility' of a 'man armoured after the modern style' making a 'lasting' contribution for the good of mankind. But all that was given to him to work with was a 'bit of flint and a nail' for lighting for mankind 'his path or his matchlock'.

In speaking of the 'flint' as the light of mankind's path as also the fire of his matchlock, Gandhi sought to make clear his recognition of the ineradicable inherence of affirmation and negation in all human artefacts. Smallness of a machine therefore does not foreclose the possibility of its use as an instrument of negation. If Gandhi's statement of technology were to

conclude with such a proposition, it would have been at perfect ease with Tagore's and the Modernist understanding of technology as a value-neutral presence. Tagore's acute unease with the Modernist position stemmed from his rejection of what he reckoned as the sovereign modern value; the quest to make ever more efficient specialisation the cardinal function and mover of technology, the definitive referent for the human mind.

For Gandhi, machine as a form of organisation, be that as material artefact (machine) or as a structure of relationships (institution), was not a value-neutral presence. Hence his conviction that it would never be possible to devise forms of organisation (machines and institutions) so perfect as to virtually abolish the decisive significance of human volition. The logic of Gandhi's position entailed clear recognition that even in the midst of most evil forms of organisation, that irreducible autonomous space given alike to the most humble and the most mighty does stand forth. For instance, lawyers, whom Gandhi castigated in *Hind Swaraj* as the chief enforcers of a pitiless system of colonial subjugation, can and do good as human beings. To clarify Gandhi's position in the language of Tagore, one could say that a form of organisation that would signify pure affirmation is inconceivable. Implicit in this proposition is also the recognition that a form of organisation that would signify pure negation is as impossible to conceive. But this dual inherence in all forms of organisation – machines and institutions – does not add up to a value-neutral presence. Forms of organisation while making certain things possible, also demarcate the salience of limits and constraints upon human autonomy.

Gandhi would have had no difficulty in recognising that small machines as much as big machines encode the salience of power a particular form of specialisation makes possible. Gandhi's difficulty with Tagore's critique of *charkha* concern the suggested way-out. Tagore believed that all one could and need do is to awaken human will to the danger of the human mind being subsumed in the logic of the machine, by firmly and clearly voicing the Truth. Gandhi shared that concern. But he was convinced that the conditions in which the human mind functioned were crucial to the affirmation of Truth and Freedom.

The conditions in which the human mind has to seek self-affirmation are constituted, according to Gandhi, as much by Nature as by what the human presence does in living and grappling with it. He often spoke of the ineliminable connection between forms of organisation (artefact, machines, institutions etc.) and the possibility of self-rule (*swaraj*) and freedom through the metaphors of body and soul. For a true seeker after *moksha* (emancipation) the body is a burden and a constraint on the life of the soul. But in that seeking after *moksha*, the body must live until the ineffable final moment of *moksha*. And like the body, machines are there 'to stay' with us. The need was to find for machines their proper 'place' and keep them just in that place.

In Gandhi's search to clarify for machines their proper place, specialised

function was not the decisive referent. Instead, he posited the reach and salience of access to resources and power a machine encodes. For instance, an 'improved plough' would be good for mankind. But if such a plough were to make it possible for 'one man' to plough all the 'land of India', it would have to be resisted as a danger to human life and Freedom. Such a 'mechanical invention' was certain to push millions to 'starve' in the indignity of forced 'idleness'. *Charkha* was not an argument against 'power-driven spindles' or machines generally, but an argument against the indignity of foreclosing access to livelihood and occupation of millions in India.

Perhaps what is striking and of enduring significance in the grand conversation between Gurudev Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi is that their critique of colonial subjugation was at each step also a self-critique. The temptation to shut off the critical inward gaze is most compelling in moments of decisive battle. Their insistence that the critical gaze must always turn inwards was anchored in a cognitive universe wherein there never could be the moment of final battle so dear to the modern revolutionary imagination. From that cognitive ground both sought to affirm that perfection of artefacts and institutions however desirable, could never be an assurance of Freedom. In the final reckoning, the striving for freedom must forever exert to master the greed and temptation to use what lies within reach to the disadvantage of the other.

But there was a fault line that ran deep and powerful between Tagore and Gandhi. The Poet reposed implicit faith in the sheer power of the word. India was for him the receptacle for the eternal word: the 'Advaitin call to humanity'. For him the knowledge that the word of Truth was there and known, was sufficient assurance of its final triumph. In this faith Tagore was perhaps closer to the Indian tradition. Gandhi's faith in the power of the word was modulated by a deep sense of imperfection inherent in human life. Truth had to be affirmed. And that required daily tending of 'lilies of the field', in whose absence the thought or the fact of 'Solomon arrayed in all his glory' could never have been. One could ask with Tagore if affirmation of Truth could be completely free of dangerous temptation. Gandhi's response neatly encapsulates his faith in the power of the word and its modulation in Gandhi:

A reformer who is enraged because his message is not accepted must retire to the forest to learn how to watch, wait and pray.

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