

Self in Indian Political Tradition: Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* and Gandhiji's *Hind Swaraj*

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The question of what constitutes the political in any political tradition revolves round the question of how the 'self' whether postulated explicitly and implicitly or rejected explicitly or implicitly, is understood and conceptualised. This is for the simple reason that the discrete individual human person, whether atomistically construed or not, is the starting point for any political discourse or political praxis. Therefore, a tentative discussion of the 'self' in Indian political tradition is presented here as an important key to understanding the notion of the political in Indian political tradition. This, of course, raises the thorny and intractable question of what constitutes Indian political tradition. I shall not get entangled too much with this issue for the purpose of this paper, and assume a somewhat deliberately simplistic notion of that tradition. The term 'Indian' can be stretched to cover a time-framework running from the Vedic period to the most recent times. I do not believe in differentiating between the various religious strands such as the Hindu, the Buddhist, the Jain and the Muslim, as separate traditions. Instead, I shall regard them as constituent elements that collectively go to make up a problematic and contestable notion of Indian tradition.

I assume a reasonable consensus on the choice of Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* and Gandhiji's *Hind Swaraj* as two seminal texts at the heart of that tradition. But before getting down to specifics, let me offer a brief comment on the overall framework and the method employed in this paper. The overall framework is simple enough to formulate, though its operationalization poses formidable challenges. But these challenges are too fundamental and fundamentally relevant to us to be either bypassed or soft-pedalled. Those trained in India in the modern social sciences as I was, become socialized into a certain conscious or subconscious stance in terms of perception and epistemology, and the first crucial step in the direction of understanding, let alone meeting, these challenges, is to make a conscious effort to get out of this stance. In short, there has to be a good bit of unlearning as a pre-condition to handling the challenges. What then is this stance? Simply put, it is the epistemological stance of observing ourselves, our past, our present and

our future, from a location exterior to ourselves and our being, and this location, in the ultimate analysis, is the West, that is, the West as refracted through colonial oppression and trauma, rather than the West as it understands itself or as it could have been understood by us in the counterfactual absence of these historically constricting afflictions.¹ We tend to look at us ourselves as the West would look at us and certainly want us to look at ourselves, not through any overt political coercion but through the far worse mechanism of internalized slavery. As a result, we become the 'other' without becoming the 'self'. In fact, we reduce the self to the other! Virtually all our predicaments and dilemmas in every aspect of our individual or collective life can be traced to this fundamental incapacity to constitute ourselves, and, worse, even to see this incapacity as the source of our historical fate. We are like patients who depend absolutely on doctors who are bent upon, not only not curing our ills, but who are determined both to aggravate the existing diseases and to add a whole lot of new ones to them! Given this understanding of our predicament, I propose to look at the Indian material with a minimal theoretical and/or ideological investment drawn on Western resources. I said 'minimal' advisedly because in this day and at this time the West is too much with us to be totally dispensed with. As a consequence, the method employed here will be to allow the texts to speak for themselves and formulate their own problems, themes and solutions through their own structure and language to the maximum extent I am capable of doing.

Before closing this introductory section, let me quickly clear out of way two possible misunderstandings. The first is to see in my position some sort of atavistic and nativistic revivalism or regression. Possibly some post-structural and post-modernist eyes might even detect the presence of an evil, the evil of essentialism. I think the onslaught on essentialism has been overplayed. While freezing historical moments into timeless essences should be properly guarded against, this is no argument against the need to generate temporarily stable structures and coherent narratives to make sense of even our attacks on essentialism. Contingency cannot displace the need for essences, and what it does is to subject essences to constant questioning. Even if one were to reject the notion of essences or the Aristotelean *telos*, one should be able to identify entities with provisional identities in order to deal with them – accept them, modify them or destroy them. Anyway reverting from this digression to my main position, I am not enamoured of the past simply because it is the past, assuming for the moment that I can construct it in its original purity. Yet

the fact that the past is our past does endow it with some privilege, legitimacy, and power, but I think this legitimacy derives ultimately from a past that has been digested and situated in the total context of our past, present and future. No individual or a society can gobble up all his/her/its past indiscriminately, but, at the same time, they cannot abolish the past equally indiscriminately. In other words, the past is always present as a presence in the present.

The second misunderstanding I anticipate is to see my position as naïve relativism. If by relativism, one implies in post-structural mode the absolute impossibility of all universalistic categories, then I am not a relativist. I am a relativist to the extent that universal categories are necessary but not sufficient in the sense that they need to be existentially mediated by local structures and realities. If one so wishes, one might call this 'qualified' relativism or even more excitingly 'relative' relativism. The point to note, however, is that we live neither in a world exclusively made up of particulars nor exclusively made of universals. We are called upon to live in, and transact with, a complicated universe in which the two are in a continuous and vibrant tension, interpenetration, confrontation, mediation and negotiation. No doubt, our colonial experience may legitimately require us now to focus more on the particular/local than on the universal, as has been done by our own subalterns or the guiltriddled post-modernists in the post-colonial West. But this can only be a matter of strategy at best. In challenging the Western universals, we are challenging merely pseudo-universals. We are, in fact, struggling hard to generate Indian universals, as Gandhiji was constantly doing. I concede that this way of putting the matter in terms of distinction and polarities is already to have yielded some ground to the Western universalistic claims, but this is a tactical concession imposed on us by our colonial fate and it may have to be withdrawn in the course of our confrontation with the Western universals.

II

Instead of asking our question, 'How does the 'self' figure and function in Kauṭilya's text?', let us find out what are the questions that the text itself may be claimed to ask and answer. For this purpose, I shall focus selectively on those portions of the text which raise general questions of principles, deliberately bypassing the others which are essentially of the type of a manual of practical instructions. I am aware that this is already to depart from the hidden Kauṭilyan assumption, an assumption central

to much traditional, pre-modern systems of thought, that theory and practice are so inextricably interwoven that no meaningful distinction or distance between them can be presupposed. While admitting this departure, I want to claim that I shall be mitigating its consequences by trying to be sensitive to the first-order implications of apparently second-order issues. For instance, I am specifically assuming that the second-order questions may also involve questions of principle but that these can be shown to be derivable from more basic first-order questions. As for the text employed here, I have preferred Shamasastri's earlier English version. Though, in some ways, Kangle's² translation and editing are superior, I find the older version more trustworthy precisely because it is old-fashioned, likely to be more faithful to the letter and the spirit of the original.

The first most basic question raised by Kauṭilya in Book I, Chapter 1, relates to the nature of his own text. He makes two points forthrightly. The first is that his work is 'a compendium of almost all the Arthasāstras...'. These earlier works are said to be written or composed by 'ancient teachers'. Right at the start, we confront a text which de-escalates individual authorship in terms of a tradition of collective knowledge transmitted incrementally and inter-generationally. But this does not mean that Kauṭilya refuses to play the role of an author but he certainly does not think much of displaying his authorial status. Hence, even before the text unfolds, we are in the presence of a particular conception of the self, though in an authorial-textual context. The self, it is implied, is a contingent conjunction, with no transcendental grounding beyond its mundane connection with the text.

The second point is that the aim of the ancient teachers in composing the Arthasāstras was to help in the 'acquisition and maintenance of the earth.' Now this way of formulating the situation eliminates the need for asking such questions as to who acquires the earth, how he/she acquires it and why does he/she acquire it. It also eliminates the issues of legitimacy – whether there are any illegitimate ways of acquiring and maintaining the earth and whether there are any 'moral' limits to the acquisition of the earth. This is not to say that such questions are not raised. Indeed, they are. But the Indian (traditional-classical) style of theoretical discourse does not raise these questions abstractly but invariably contextually and concretely. In other words, the universal and the general is always cognized as embodied and concretely articulated. In sharp contrast, the Western theory discourse tends to formulate and discuss such issues in an abstractly theoretical mode, presupposing a gap

between theory and reality. No wonder Indian scholars, reared in the Western discourse tradition, though not really good Western scholars themselves, tend to reject this Indian way of doing theory as either wholly untheoretical or inadequately theoretical.³ Already we have here the modern Western problem of the self in a concealed form but as a problem theoretically rejected as out of court.

In the Western theoretical tradition, even in its premodern history including, surprisingly enough, its Christian phase (perhaps not so surprising considering the Lutheran claims on behalf of the individual Christian conscience), the self begins to constitute itself as a privileged and autonomous and self-authenticating category. This becomes, however, more explicitly articulated in the modern period, climaxing in the Kantian hymns to the rational and autonomous self. Though in the early modern period, even in Descartes, one finds an attempt to ground this rational self in a first principle or God, the subsequent history of modern Western culture appears to have been a gradual rejection of any transcendentalism. In a way, the current post-structural, post-modernist attacks on foundationalism and originarism were already implicit as a potentiality in the project of modernity. In any case, modernity, as is now becoming increasingly clear, is inherently undefinable, as it has built into it a principle of perpetual self-denial.

But the notion of the author as an individual person creating an original text and owning responsibility for it, thanks to the cultural institutionalization of writing through the Gutenberg Galaxy is a common place notion in the Western tradition. The text is fatally attached to an unreplicable, unique signature. Kautilya's formulation rejects the possibility of such an inflated authorial self, endowed with a self-propelling and self-legitimizing rationality creating abstract and conceptual structures delinked from a God-created existential order. Taken in conjunction, the two assumptions, the Kautilyan assumption of a self that cannot create original texts *ab initio* and the modern notion of an authorial self that can textually construct its own universe of abstractions and conceptual entities by its own rationality, out of and even counter to, the reality created by God or naturally and non-humanly given as a facticity, leads one to choose between two options: one may assert that the self was not constituted formally as a serious issue in the Indian political or cultural traditions as articulated by Kautilya or that Kautilya does subscribe to a notion of the self but one far removed from the familiar post-medieval Western notion of the self. The Kautilyan self seems to have considerable moral, intellectual, and psychological

advantage over the modern insofar as it may enable us to produce, almost paradoxically, a self based on our self-constituted self!

In Book I, Chapters II to IV, the theme is the 'The End of Sciences', that is, the purpose/purposes and function/functions of 'Sciences'. Of course, the term science here obviously does not signify our current, modern Western and restrictive notion, and it refers broadly to any traditionally crystallized body of knowledge centring on any specified and bounded terrain. But first we can see that Kauṭilya sees no essential distinction between an individual author and the collectivity of producers of the knowledge system to which he contributes because he sees his authorship as merging into a background of knowledge created by his predecessors. But this acknowledgment of collective wisdom does not imply any genuflexion before the past. Neither total rejection nor slavish subservience to tradition characterizes this tradition. Kauṭilya mentions the positions of the school of Manu, the school of Bṛhaspati, and the school of Usanas, but does not hesitate to depart from them to articulate his own position. One can perhaps describe this stance as one of *being of a tradition without being in it*. While he calls his own views as those of an individual teacher, he discards the view of others not as those of individuals but as of schools.

Why does he not speak of a school of his own, the school of Kauṭilya? Of course, the immediate answer is that he has yet to found a school of his own. This implies that knowledge grows both through the contribution of unique individuals of genius and through a collectivity of individuals who work within the given parameters, yet adding to it. To the successors, knowledge comes down, transmitted through schools. All this may appear trivial and obvious, but it underscores an important point – individual contributions acquire salience only when enmeshed in a collective context. Is this historical process of growth of knowledge different from that in the West? The answer is both 'yes' and 'no'. 'Yes' because this is how knowledge seems to have grown in the West through an incremental process, involving a crowd of 'plodders' and at nodal points, 'geniuses'. 'No' because the relationship between the plodders and geniuses is not the same in the two traditions. The qualitative difference between the two is that the Indian tradition downgrades the ploddingness of the plodders as well as the superior claims of the geniuses. This is because the self of the plodders as well as the self of the geniuses are effaced by the overarching authority of the collective tradition. In contrast, in the West, despite schools and similar collective structures, the tendency is to emphasize the self of both categories by

downgrading that of the plodders while elevating that of the geniuses.

No doubt Kauṭilya takes considerable pains to emphasize his difference from the predecessor schools, but he does it in such a way that his views are formulated in a predominantly third-person vocabulary, thus minimizing the intrusion of the self into a truth domain transcending all self-considerations. Through what looks like a trivial discussion of merely the number of legitimate sciences, Kauṭilya underlines his difference from the earlier schools in more substantive terms. According to his own position, there are four legitimate sciences, and they are: Ānvīkṣikī or roughly metaphysics/philosophy, the Vedas (he recognizes only three, the Trayī), Vārtā (agriculture, cattle-breeding and trade), and Daṇḍanīti (science of government). His reasons for arriving at this position are not elaborated but they are fairly clear. The school of Manu is rejected because it subsumes Ānvīkṣikī under the Vedas whereas Kauṭilya pleads for a relative autonomy for the reasoning self by carving some space for Ānvīkṣikī demarcated away from the authority of the Vedas. However, Kauṭilya does not go into the question of the relationship between this relatively autonomous philosophical activity and the authoritative Vedas. One is left to speculate on several possibilities. It is possible to infer that Ānvīkṣikī has a limited right to question the truth of the Vedas, and the truth then can be said to emerge out of a dialectical interaction between the traditional Indian categories of Śruti (Vedas) and Smṛti (rational enquiry) including Ācāra (praxis). In other words, Śruti or revealed truth, while ultimately absolute, is available to human beings through the contingency of their temporal reasoning. In this formulations, Ānvīkṣikī and the Vedas are placed on a footing of equality at the level of human transaction. On the other hand, it is possible that Ānvīkṣikī and Vedas are not equal, though separate, and that the function of Ānvīkṣikī, i.e., merely to interpret and clarify the Vedas, never to question them. But in the Indian tradition, interpretation tends to spill over into interrogation and even original creation by a self disguising itself as non-self. It is clear that both the situations obtained in pre-Muslim India, thus enabling the production of intellectual structures by a constantly self-subordinating self.

Kauṭilya rejects the school of Bṛhaspati because it held that there are only two sciences – the Vārtā and Daṇḍanīti. This school rejects the Vedas because its truth is subsumed under Lokayatavidah, that is, the practical experience of temporality or temporal affairs. In short, it reduced the transcendental and the trans-historical to the temporal. Though Kauṭilya does not explain why he takes this view, one can hazard a guess. It may

be that he recognized the inadequacy of human rationality as an instrument for investigating truth, without the back-up of some transcendental security. In other words, one needs both *Ānvīkṣikī* and the Vedas. The school of Usana is rejected because in its passion for parsimony it recognizes only one science as legitimate, the science of government. To Kauṭilya, government is not a wholly autonomous arena, and it must be grounded in both moral and spiritual terrains, and hence knowledge of government needs to be situated within a wider complex of sciences.

Is Kauṭilya here attacking reductionism, that is, a mode of eliminating cognitive diversity rooted in a diversified reality? Or is he merely attacking what may be called cognitive monism while accepting metaphysical/ontological diversity? In more plain language, is he saying that reality is one but modes of its epistemological appropriation four? Or does he consider reality a system of interdependence between four aspects of reality and therefore we need four separate modes of cognition or sciences? The text itself does not give us any unequivocal answer, though it is possible to relate this situation to the traditional Indian theory of the four *Puruṣārthas*.⁴

As for the goal of these sciences, Kauṭilya clearly states that it is to provide a knowledge of 'righteousness' or right conduct or moral principles as well as to help acquire wealth or material goods. In other words, the moral and the material goals are seen as cohering within a single structure of knowledge. But it is, however, not clear whether the implication is that all the four sciences yield knowledge in both the registers, though they might differ in their mode of doing so or whether the two sets of concerns are narrowly tied and distributed across the sciences – the first two sciences to moral goal and the last two sciences to wealth or material goal. Perhaps, in view of a clear statement supporting the second implication, it is safer not to accept the first in which the principle of functional separation and specialization co-exists with metaphysical integration. As the text says, the *Ānvīkṣikī* is co-terminous with philosophy, itself comprising the traditional *darśanas*, including the *Lokāyata*. But what is the function of philosophy itself? We get no clear clue but it may be inferred that it is multi-functional, different functions being performed by different metaphysical systems – the *Śāṅkhya*, the *Yoga* and the *Lokāyata*.

This raises such questions as: what is their relationship to the enquiry into righteousness? Does each one of them generate its own specific set of rules and norms regarding righteousness, and, if so, do we have here

a metaphysical pluralism leading to a moral pluralism? If the answer is 'yes', then the Indian tradition would appear to be morally more liberal than most modern ethical discourses. The Vedas are said to teach us what constitute righteous acts and what unrighteous acts. But in what sense? Do they perform this role through authoritative prescription or through an understanding of the moral issues involved in a concrete situation in terms of rational argumentation and/or exemplars embodying righteousness in narrative discourses? These are important questions with a bearing on the question of the self in Indian tradition. Let me probe this a little further. We may construct a 'self' which thinks for itself and arrives at what is righteous and what is not righteous, either in a purely abstract-analytical mode or through an abstract-analytical mode as applied to narrated exemplars, say, the episodes in the epics.

It is not very material whether the moral reflection is stimulated by abstract considerations or concrete exemplars, but what is important is that one reflects before choosing a particular course of action. In this sense, the self is autonomous but within a whole complex reality which perpetually restricts the autonomy and engages in a dialectical tension with it. Moreover, the self in the Indian tradition, unlike in the modern Western political theory, reflects not abstractly on other abstractions but reflects abstractly on concretely presented exemplars in a narrative discourse. The traditional self, thus, is more centrally engaged in existence than the modern Western self, and thus tends to minimize the theory-praxis dichotomy. Its notion of theory, to borrow from Marxist vocabulary, is a notion of theory of theory and practice. If the encounter with the Vedas is taken to be one moment, certainly a crucial moment, in the process of reaching an understanding of righteousness, then how do the Vedas differ functionally from the *Ānvīkṣiki*? Perhaps the answer is that the Vedas provide a transcendental/intuitive grounding, which is necessary but not sufficient for attaining true knowledge of the right and the good. The sufficient condition is provided by the Veda-informed reflection of the self seeking to attain such knowledge. The *Vārtā* is a more transparent category. It is a science yielding knowledge about the ways in which wealth can be produced or acquired and the ways in which it cannot be produced or acquired. The science of government is supposed to yield knowledge about the 'expedient', 'inexpedient', 'potency' and 'impotency'.

In fact, *Arthaśāstra* is not concerned with wealth production at all, and it is on a terrain on which strategies and tactical moves are made in a perpetual game of acquiring physical or coercive power. Does it then

follow that Kauṭilya excludes from the science of government issues of morality, of righteousness and unrighteousness? Certainly he does so, but to say this is also misleading unless one adds the rider that this formulation is applied only to government considered as a means and a mechanism. It may be morally disengaged at a secondary level but it can never be morally indifferent. In its aspect as a means it needs justification and legitimation by ends which are postulated on another terrain, the terrain of the Ānvikṣikī in conjunction with the Vedas. Thus, Kauṭilya shifts issues modern Western political theory would discuss to the realm of philosophy and the transcendental-intuitive. The autonomy of the government is only in terms of its status as a means, as a machinery, but in relation to ends it has to be subordinate to the moral domain. That is why Kauṭilya assigns the highest place to the domain of Ānvikṣikī, the domain where ends are negotiated. He calls it the 'most beneficial to the world'. It keeps the mind 'steady and firm in weal and woe', and confers on those who study it 'excellence of foresight, speech and action'. The function of the triple Vedas – Sāma, Ṛg and Yajur – is 'to determine the respective duties of the four castes and of the four orders of religious life.' In short, the government⁵ may have its own technical ends pertaining to limited short-term instrumental goals, but these must be consistent with, and conducive to, the most fundamental life-goals postulated by the Vedas in the form of Varnāśrama *dharma*, as mediated reflexively by Ānvikṣikī. The triple Vedas stipulate authoritatively in their role as Śruti the duties to be followed by an individual as a member of a community organised on the basis of the Varnāśrama *dharma*. The duties relating to one's own caste and one's stage of life are absolute as regulating norms. Their violation would result in the destruction of the world itself because of 'confusion of castes and duties'. But if one followed one's caste duties one would attain '*svarga*' (paradise/heaven) and '*anantya*' (bliss of infinity). Kauṭilya does not merely call upon the individual to do his duties on pain of rewards and punishments in after-life; he re-situates them politically within a system of this-worldly rewards and punishments by transforming these moral duties into political duties to the king who himself is bound by the Varnāśrama *dharma* to uphold Varnāśrama *dharma*. Thus the self comes to be defined ultimately as a subject of moral and political duties enshrined in the Varnāśrama *dharma* but contingently generated through the Śruti-Smṛti dialectic. One might at this point argue that the self has been negated by impersonal codes and sanctions or alternatively hold that the self is salvaged through being permitted to reflexively internalize the codes, subject to the ultimate

royal authority to recognize whether a duty has been performed or violated.

Yet it is difficult to avoid the impression that Kauṭilya displays a strong proclivity to displace even this restrictive reflexivity by the self by stating that all the three contexts – those of Ānvīkṣikī, Vedas and Vārtā – which allow the self limited reflexivity and opportunity to assert autonomy, rest on the enforceability of the Daṇḍa, the coercive power of the government, its function of punishing violation of not merely legal codes enacted by royal authority but more basic moral-social codes founding the very social order. But it must be noted that it is not clear whether Kauṭilya is talking about the issues in epistemological/theoretical terms or in purely praxeological terms. This apart, Kauṭilya circumscribes the Daṇḍa function by making it unqualifiably functional, that is, making it precisely adequate in authority to its function of punishing violation of the codes. The punishment has to be just and right in terms of the overall societal goals, and never too severe nor too light. Punishment must be based on 'due consideration', not on a ruler's personal whims and fancies, greed and anger. In fact, a properly trained ruler will not show these weaknesses in carrying out his duties. If he does so, it is from ignorance. In any case, the need for the Daṇḍa can be scarcely overestimated as its absence will lead to disorder and the classical law of the fish – the bigger and stronger fish swallowing the smaller and the weaker. In short, the regime is conceptualized as one in which naked and physical force is replaced by physical force employed according to explicit and implicit codes sanctioned and legitimated by a religious-moral authority located simultaneously and with some tension in the transcendental (Śruti) and the socio-communal (Smṛti and Ācāra) domains.

Kauṭilya then formulates the question of organized society and the government in terms of 'vinaya' (discipline), linking it to duty. The aim of government is to procure 'safety and security of life' and, it is further said, to involve observance of discipline (Vinaya). Kauṭilya then goes on to draw a distinction between two kinds of discipline – artificial and natural. By natural discipline is meant the discipline naturally followed by a person who is docile enough or has the temperament to accept and follow rules of the discipline. Those not naturally endowed with the capacity of docility or perhaps more accurately unresisting receptivity, simply cannot be disciplined. The modern tradition which recognizes and glorifies an authentic and autonomous self would draw a different kind of distinction – between inner-directed and other-directed discipline. For Kauṭilya, the distinction is a sharper one between those who can be

disciplined and those who cannot be. The discipline here refers not to discipline focussed on purposive action but to discipline focussed on disposition and knowledge/ awareness. The disciplines – in the sense of disciplining as well as systems of knowledge – can have effect only on those who are naturally disciplinable, 'who are possessed of such mental faculties as obedience, hearing, grasping, retentive memory, discrimination, inference, and deliberation, but not others devoid of such faculties...' What should one do with the unteachable? In sharp contrast to the modern ideology of equality, the Kauṭilyan tradition accepts an inherent inequality between human beings in a mundane context, though they might be equal on a transcendental and transmundane level. Then Kauṭilya tries to answer the question: Who has authority to legislate on matters of discipline? His answer in brief is 'under the authority of specialist teachers.' Here again, the modern tradition will privilege specialists up to a point but also provide room for the laity to ruffle the calm self-assurance of the experts in the name of democracy, equality and liberty. Kauṭilya follows up the study of discipline with discipline in the sense of moulding personality and behaviour.

By far the most important component of Kauṭilya's regimen of discipline is control of the organs of sense. Specifically, it is stated that sense organs can be controlled only by giving up 'lust, anger, greed, vanity (*māna*), haughtiness (*mada*) and overjoy (*harṣa*): otherwise, one cannot succeed either in theoretical study or in practical discipline. Now Kauṭilya argues that both discipline in the sense of study and discipline in the sense of practical behaviour have the identical goal of enabling the person involved to control his sense organs. In a specific reference to the king, Kauṭilya holds that control of sense organs helps the king resist the temptation to indulge in such evil as hurting women or the property of others, lustfulness, haughtiness, and so on. This control of senses, in fact, promotes a better enjoyment of desire. In other words, control of the senses does not mean elimination of the senses but only a moderate and balanced enjoyment of the senses. On the one hand, Kauṭilya asserts categorically that the three pursuits of life – charity, wealth, and desire – are interdependent, and excessive enjoyment of any one of them would hurt the other two but also hurts the one excessively indulged in as well. On the other hand, Kauṭilya also asserts that '...wealth, and wealth alone, is important, inasmuch as charity and desire depend upon wealth for their realization...' But, at least in the English version, it is not clear how desire can be a goal on par with charity and wealth. But one should perhaps take desire to mean just the craving for things, no matter how

many and what are desired. But the more important question is how Kauṭilya can logically assign to wealth such exclusive importance if he wants to emphasize the interdependence of all the three.

Considerable naïveté and ambiguity surrounds Kauṭilya's oft-quoted statement on the king which runs, '...In the happiness of his subjects lies his happiness; in their welfare his welfare; whatever pleases himself he shall not consider as good, but whatever pleases his subjects he shall consider as good...'. There is no serious problem with regard to the notions of happiness or welfare of the people. But what about the notion of the good? The moot question here is: Does Kauṭilya consider the notion of the good as a subjectively held category whether by the king or the people and hence there can be no objective good transcending the subjective perceptions of the king or the people? Is Kauṭilya here liable to be credited with the notion of a populist democracy of the modern variety?

Now let me sum up the status, understanding, and formulation of the issue of the self in the Indian political tradition as articulated in its most important text on politics. Firstly, it is possible and quite consistent with the text to argue that the question of the self in the sense of a non-negotiable and absolutely autonomous category does not arise for Kauṭilya, given his tradition, and hence the self does not figure in his discourse at all. But it would also be quite logical and consistent with the text to argue that the very suppression of even the possibility of such a self is itself an implicit and articulated position on the self. In the latter case, one can say that the 'self' can be formulated in more than one way and that Kauṭilyan tradition of theory and the political practice reflected in it conceptualize a notion of the self in which the self is *a structurally and essentially self-limiting category*, and, therefore, in striking contrast to the modern liberal notion, the Kauṭilyan self is authentic or rather morally valid to the extent it can discipline itself to accommodate the non-self or the other, whether the other is the other persons or material nature or the cosmos itself. Secondly, the Kauṭilyan tradition of political theory defines theory in a way which is theoretically different from the modern liberal notion of theory, though it is closer to the Marxist. How does the self create the theory? In the modern version, theory arises from the self-validating authority of the self whose rationality as well as existential experience both produce and validate truth as well as its practical articulation. For Kauṭilya and the political theory tradition he embodies, there can be no such theory that can be theoretically constructed by a God-like self. The theory is subject to or rather is already implicated in

practice through the mediation of Smṛti and Sadācāra. In other words, the Indian classical tradition (by classical I mean roughly the tradition in existence prior to the Muslim presence) conceptualizes the relationship between 'theory' and 'practice' in such a way that neither 'theory' nor 'practice' exist and function independent of some less time-bound, if not timeless, category, designated 'Śruti', the directly revealed, the blindingly illuminated to the 'sages' in the mythical past. This kind of theory is not 'created' by the originality of the conscious reasoning of a concrete human individual. The theory-building 'self' in this tradition of theory has the very limited role of making a continuously dialectical adjustment to the twin co-ordinates of 'Smṛti' and 'Sadācāra'. One may then ask the question: Under what structural conditions can such a theory of theory function? The answer surely is that this is possible only in highly integrated communitarian societies, very akin to what anthropologists have called 'tribes', in which the elite and the ordinary folk accept unquestioningly the authority of Śruti, not just its authority but also its 'content' and message, and one in which interpersonal communications are so direct and so transparent that the 'exemplar' or the 'Sadācāri' (the one considered to be following Smṛti in his personal life) can be located and cognized immediately and without any conflict of interpretation or evaluation. Thirdly, given the above situation, it is not at all surprising that the self is conceptualized in terms of duties, obligations, and functions, rather than in terms of rights. No doubt, one can arrive at rights in a limited sense via duties, obligations and functions. For instance, if a person A has the duty to perform function F, and if a person B is the beneficiary of the performance of the function F by A, then one can say that B has a right to the benefits arising from the performance of F by A. But the rights-framework would raise the further question: What if A fails to perform F? Surely in the Kauṭilyan tradition, B may receive the benefit, thanks to the dutifulness of A, but there is no right on the part of B. He may receive the benefit, thanks to the dutifulness of A, but there is no right on the part of B involved. However, it is possible to argue in a complicated way that B's function may involve his questioning A why he has not performed F. In other words, it is possible to convert duties into rights up to a point but there are severe limits both in theory and practice to this process. The self then in this political tradition is a self that internalizes through discipline its disposition to perform its functions and duties, and the sum total of all these performances by all or almost all members of the society leads to an orderly community existence. Fourthly, rights, duties, and functions are defined, not in terms of an

abstracted universal human individual, but one which is necessarily clothed already in certain roles defined through the process of an interaction between a relatively constant Śruti and relatively mutable Smṛti and Ācāra.

Thus, the classical Indian tradition of political theory and practice tends very strongly towards stability, equilibrium and equipoise. This raises two separate questions, often confused. The first is whether this tradition is desirable and acceptable on moral, aesthetic, intellectual, or some other ground? The second question is whether, even if acceptable or desirable, is it feasible in our contemporary concrete situation? Professor K.J. Shah is certainly right in holding that modern Indian intellectual tradition and culture has tried to answer the second question without answering the first question. Further, he is also right in arguing that the two questions are asked and answered even before any serious intellectual effort is invested in answering the question: What is the structure – form and content – of the classical Indian tradition?

Before leaving the world of classical tradition, one more important point needs to be made. Though Kauṭilya regarded Daṇḍa or governmental function as the basis and foundation of all other functions, it is very important to remember that this assumption applies only insofar as means and instruments of maintaining society are concerned. So far as the goals are concerned, the governmental power is subordinate to the ends prescribed through a societal process in which Śruti, Smṛti and Ācāra are involved in a continuous and dialectical interaction. Further, in this process, Śruti enjoys a privileged status both morally and intellectually. The absolute unquestionability of the society based on Varnāśrama *dharma* derives from this privileged status of the triple Vedas, though marginal deviations and deflections from it may be accepted as unavoidable existential hazards. In short, to use the terminology of modern Western political theory, which has now become part of modern political science theory and practice in India, the classical Indian political tradition is society-centred as it subordinates state and government to the societal mandates. This way of putting it is not wrong but misleadingly inadequate. One must also add the further crucial rider that the superiority of the societal order itself derives from its conformity to the injunctions of morality, *dharma*. But certainly, it does also imply that the proper locus of *dharma* is society, not government or State. For the realization of the goals of Puruṣārthas – *dharma, artha, kama and moksa* – one needs a society based on *dharma* but also a state/Government based on its capacity to conform to *dharma* generated by social existence.

III

In the preface to the *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi makes a few comments which have a bearing on the issue of the self. First he writes, '... The views I venture to place before the readers are, needless to say, held by many Indians not touched by what is known as civilization, but I ask the readers to believe me when I tell him that they are also held by thousands of Europeans...'.⁶ Here, what is significant is that in this apparently inconsequential context, Gandhi has formulated a notion of the self as both the self and the other. This formulation both continues and departs from the classical line of tradition. It is a continuation insofar as it privileges the self as a collective category, belonging to one specific civilization, the traditional Indian, and different from another, the modern civilization. But unlike the classical tradition which did not have to encounter historically anything structurally so different from it as the modern civilization, the same tradition Gandhi had to reckon with such an historical fate. Therefore, Gandhi had to apply the tradition to this new situation. How does he go about it? He does it by noting both the distinctiveness and universality of the Indian tradition. On the one hand, it is not universal insofar as it is a category belonging to India, as distinct from 'modern civilization', but, on the other hand, it is also a universal category shared by many Europeans. In other words, those who share it as well as those who do not share it live in India as well as in Europe. But what is Indian about it is that it attained its most articulated expression in India. The second statement also reflects the need for making some change in the tradition in the context of a post-Muslim, colonial India. He writes, '...others who may see the following chapters will pass their criticism on to me....If, therefore, my views are proved to be wrong, I shall have no hesitation in rejecting them...'.⁷ This passage appears to recognize the legitimacy of a self which can criticize his work and also of a self which can reject the work if proved wrong. As we saw in Kautilya, the self that had authority to question a text was a specialist self, but here we have the self of an unqualified individual or individuals who are not specialists. Is Gandhi here slipping away from tradition and slipping into a modernity? As we will see, this question cannot have a simple answer. Of course he departs from tradition but only far enough to accommodate the objective pressure of what I would like to call existential modernity, that is, modernity as a set of concrete life-conditions, which should be distinguished from modernity as an ideology accepted consciously whether after critical reflection or not. The first kind of modernity is inescapable to anyone living in a certain place at a certain time. The

second kind, ideological modernity, is subject to critical reflection to a greater extent, and, in fact, it provides some space outside existential modernity from which one can see alternatives to it. I suggest that here Gandhi has accommodated existential modernity without succumbing to ideological modernity.

I shall not go into details but simply look at what I take to be the overall frame and thrust of the work as a whole. For instance, in criticizing Gokhale, he also respects him and evaluates him. This means he relates to what has gone before him but does not blindly bind himself to it. This may appear to be a modern modality but, on more careful scrutiny, it appears to be the traditional mode of recognizing a dialectical interaction between Śruti and Smṛti and Ācāra. It appears to be modern because in the context of existential modernity the gap between Śruti and Smṛti and Ācāra is bound to be significant. Gandhi defines Smṛti in terms of Truth and Ahimsa. Is he right in doing so? Some commentators have argued that Gandhi accepts as basic the fourfold goals of *dharma, artha, kama and moksa* in the precise manner accepted by the classical tradition. However, Gandhi's overall and perhaps even overriding compulsion to emphasize 'morality' at the cost of expediency, 'soul' at the cost of body or sense, would place him in the Indian tradition in a peculiar sense. Though Gandhi himself subsumed under Hinduism, both Jainism and Buddhism, I suggest that he inclines more towards the Buddhist and Jain elements in the Indian tradition than to the narrowly Hindu element. Not that he rejects the Hindu element, but he moves constantly towards a position which is not narrowly Hindu, and later on he accepts Islam and Christianity as essentially compatible with this 'Indian' tradition in terms of an essential and universal religiousness. But one should, however, resist the temptation to simplify here. It is no less important to note that Gandhi arrives at this universality not through an a priori abstract concept but through his own Indian tradition and also without surrendering its specificity to a supposedly universal abstraction... The self presupposed here seems to be the Vedantic self which maintains that the real is neither the particular nor the universal, both abstractions, but the particular as the universal and the universal as the particular. Reality lies in the tension-ridden relationship between the two. As he put it, he could reach the universal only through his particularity as an Indian. Underlying both the particular and the universal was an overriding continuity and harmony, call it God or Truth.

In Gandhi's formulation, the self has the same status as in the classical tradition in a structural sense, but, under the compulsions of the

Kaliyuga, Gandhi would burden the self with a greater responsibility to discover and experience truth both as a rationally constituted category and as a directly and intuitively perceived category. That is why Gandhi can be appropriated by extreme traditionalists and reactionaries, revolutionary modernists and those who accept a model in which tradition changes but without structural disruptions and violences. My own view is that what Gandhi shows is the limits of balancing existential modernity and the ideological system implied in the classical Indian tradition. In short, what we find in Gandhi is *both the possibility and the impossibility of being exclusively 'modern' or 'traditional' in the context of what I have called 'existential modernity'*. Another way of formulating this position is to say that Gandhi accepts the ideals of the classical Indian political tradition *morally and intellectually* but tries to work out their practical implications in the face of existential modernity. This should not be mistaken for eclecticism or soft synthesis. Indeed, Gandhi experimented with himself like a scientist to see how this programme could be initiated, organized and operated under objective conditions. He was no starry-eyed utopian, and equally he was no blind traditionalist. He always saw a distinction between the geometrical precision of ideals and the rough-edgedness of the here and the now.

When Gandhi advocates the Varna system but rejects untouchability or when he accepts the subordination of the state to society but does not reject the state or when he attacks machinery as a violation of Ahimsa but also accepts machinery that can be shown to be more conducive to Ahimsa than to Himsa in a given situation, he was trying hard to harness the ideal to objective reality but also harness objective reality to the ideal – not to compromise but to realize. Of course, this meant, for Gandhi, not compromise with everything but only with what was regarded as secondary and inessential to the ideal. So far as the essential was concerned, Gandhi advocated the ultimate sacrifice of one's life – between violence to oneself and to others, it is better to do violence to oneself. Is this a rejection of the self? Gandhi would argue that the self as soul is saved at the cost of the self as body or rather the soul which gave the body life is saved. The Gandhian struggle was based on two principles – non-violence involving the ultimate sacrifice of one's life and no compromise on basics but reasonable compromise on inessentials. It is also in this sense that Gandhi held that religion cannot be separated from politics, and religion here meant morality which formed the basis for the distinction between the essential and the secondary.

Gandhi continued the tradition in terms of its essentials – religious-

moral foundation of politics, subordination of the state to society insofar as the latter was the natural repository of morality, the regime of duties as against a regime of rights but, given the Kaliyuga context, a regime in which duties and rights limited each other in the cause of true morality. The self one sees behind all these positions is close to the traditional self but not close enough to be wholly absorbed into it. Gandhi left a small space for the self in the modern sense as a necessary price for living under conditions of existential modernity. But it would be a serious misrepresentation of Gandhi to reduce this morally capable self to the Kantian self which is autonomous and self-authenticating in a universe unmanned by any transcendental category like God. Certainly, it cannot be reduced to the utilitarian self, Benthamite or Mill's utilitarian self, self-calculating and self-promoting in a world equally devoid of transcendental categories. But in a God-driven universe, the Gandhian self, continuing the classical Indian political tradition, the self Gandhi postulated, exercises autonomy and performs utilitarian calculations but the utility it calculates is moral good. It is worth considering whether Gandhi should not be characterized as a transcendental utilitarian, who calculates the good that transcends the individual, even humanity, and embraces all reality.

REFERENCES

1. Most of the substantial arguments of this paper owe an intangible debt to my good friend, the late Professor K.J. Shah, but I have also differences with him. He should not, of course, be held responsible for my position.
2. R.P.Kangle, ed., *The Kauṭilya Arthaśāstra* (Bombay; Bombay University Press, 1963). All citations in this paper are from R. Shamasastri, ed., *Kauṭilya's Arthaśāstra*, (Mysore: Mysore Printing and Publishing House, 1967), Eighth Edition.
3. I speak from my own personal experience until I was made to see this point first by my teacher, the late Professor R. Bhaskaran but more clearly by Professor K.J. Shah.
4. Professor K.J. Shah has been the most consistent and eloquent exponent of this position.
5. Modern Western political theory makes a distinction between state as an abstract category and government as the concrete manifestation of the state. Such a distinction is not relevant to Kauṭilya as well as to pre-modern Western tradition.
6. 'Hind Swaraj' in Raghavan Iyer, ed., *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 1, Civilization, Politics, and Religion, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 199-200.
7. Ibid.

