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## Rendering Gandhi: Acts of Engagement

SASHEEJ HEGDE\*

The art of transposing truth is one of the most essential and the least known. What makes it difficult is that, in order to practice it, one has to have placed oneself at the centre of a truth and possessed it in all its nakedness, behind the particular form in which it happens to have found expression. Furthermore, transposition is a criterion of truth. A truth which cannot be transposed isn't a truth; in the same way that what doesn't change in appearance according to the point of view isn't a real object, but a deceptive representation as such.

SIMONE WEIL (1987: 67-8)

Bapu, you are far greater than your little books.

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU (CITED IN NANDY 1987: 115)

Living as I do in a socio-political context where 'Gandhi' is both an object of veneration and a figure of contempt, the rendering that I seek to effect might seem a balancing act. And yet, I must reiterate in a gesture that, hopefully, settles the difference that is 'me', this 'text', and our time—I am no specialist on Gandhi or affairs 'Gandhian'.<sup>1</sup> Basically, I am working with, and through, certain intuitions and instincts about the figure; and, what is more, delivering

largely from, and into, a literature about Gandhi rather than directly from him. I have no particular justification for this procedure, partly epiphanic, partly representational, juxtaposing images, thoughts and fragments, and reaching beyond them, except to claim that we are here mostly dealing with ways of *making-present* (and not simply, *making sense* of) Gandhi.

These two operations of rendering, it need be emphasized, although

distinct, are not necessarily separate. Broadly the latter, namely, 'making sense' has to do with delineating the features of Gandhi, in the sense, say, of delivering 'snapshots' of his life and thought; whereas the former (that is, making-present) concerns a definition of his specificity: emphatically, what makes Gandhi 'Gandhi'? The distinction however, is problematical, in that the discourse, in doubling back and forth between these two foci, leaves open

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the question just what it is in Gandhi is legitimate, his own, or being legitimated. I am for the moment suspending the precise bearing of this circumstance for our exercise of making-present Gandhi. We need only consider how the effect of specialty (or specialism) manifests itself on our theoretical and political landscape to see how it diminishes the value of the 'subject' being attended. Pulled into a settled position, most specialists (or specialisms) seem unable to think the possibility that the rules, or even the game, could be different or questioned.

Particularly, and with specific reference to the subject being spoken about here, one has to contend with the various assimilations surrounding Gandhi. This being so, it must be made clear at the very outset that I have no intentions of speaking plainly about Gandhi, in the sense of either proclaiming the philosophy behind his thought or the inner unity of his thought; at least, not quite. Nothing also, I guess, is advanced by attesting to the continued force of his ideas. I go with Gandhi without having gone with him; and, in going without having gone, can only speak (that is, think) a good deal about him. In rendering Gandhi therefore, one is also trying hard to speak with him, in-the-place-of him-giving body, that is, to a sort of deadlock. Belonging as I do to a generation that was not even born when independence and partition and assassination came upon us, there is more than just a sense of loss, perhaps even melancholia, here. Accordingly, it is not a situation where one takes heart and lets go; nor is it some vague, unsettled indifference, by which and through which avoidance may be

inscribed or reinforced. The feeling, rather, records a movement that is at once filial and ennobling—as if in transposing a presence, one is trying hard to secure that very presence, retaining it as at once fond and wondrous—a chance being kept. This, incidentally, might allow another question. What is to know, or to have known, Gandhi, where to know, or to have known, is no longer a matter of turning outward, toward an experience, an order of knowledge, but rather one of 'following tracks, of inferring rather than grasping or being grasped' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 53).

The suggestion, it seems to me, lends a distinctive edge to our exercise of making-present Gandhi, especially since the effort is to work from specific intuitions and instincts to the background picture, the moral ontology, in terms of which a certain transposition could be effected. Needless to say, the modality of my engagement will eschew a linear mode of appraisal.

#### BURDENS OF JUDGMENT

I begin with a plethora of readings and renderings of Gandhi and work my way through the insistence within them, across them, of there being many facets to Gandhi, each calling for, and comprising, in its turn, a whole. These engagements, as we shall soon see, have not always let themselves be approached by *the resistance*—let me underscore the words—which Gandhi offers thought. This, the resistance which Gandhi offers thought, marks a plane of immanence from which one must begin.<sup>2</sup> Of course, one need ask whether this insistence were not either too sharp or subtle, but consider the following. The word

'resistance' summarizes a plane which, as I aver and will strive to demonstrate, is quintessentially Gandhian; it also implies, in that sense, an image of thought that is transposable. In thinking this image and weaving it around the figure, we must guard against a confusion all the same—one claiming the figure as a sort of 'transcendental universal'. If the resistance which Gandhi offers thought were to be interpreted as a resistance *to* thought, then the figure anterior to this 'to'-namely, Gandhi/resistance-would, it seems to me, revive the transcendent, and consequently to be avoided. What one is imploring therefore is a certain suspended relation to meaning and reference (which, to reiterate, is not to imply a symbolic reappropriation!). Let me elaborate.

In the sheer compulsive enormity of the understandings being brought to bear upon Gandhi, the argument, really, of a senior political scientist, K Raghavendra Rao (1986: 128)—that 'we have to contend with an *absence of an intellectual tradition of coping with Gandhi*' (emphasis in original)—seems only a variant of, or a pre-text to, the various engagements with the figure: Gandhi the 'traditionalist', the 'critical traditionalist', the critic of modern civilization, the 'non-player'; '(one) critically inhabiting the margins of culture', 'the underside of non-modern India's ethnic universalism', the 'totally atypical Indian', a 'genuine son of the soil', the 'integral individual'; the 'well-known (—) religious man' who 'reckoned social reform and political action among his religious duties', the true 'karma yogin', 'a satyagrahi searching his soul in public, rather than as the private agonizings of a private individual'; Vedantin,

advaitin, Buddhist, 'crypto-Christian', the protagonist of Hindu 'consolidation' (fundamentalism?) and Hindu-Muslim 'reconciliation'; the ascetic, 'non-renouncer', a state of mind in quest of metanoia, 'Primordial Tradition'; the 'pragmatic utopian', the 'ultimate anarchist', the 'shrewd bania', 'Machiavellian'; saint, politician, health faddist, 'celibate'; a scientist pursuing truth; the Mahatma; and so on.<sup>3</sup>

Or again: the Gandhian moment/idiom/ideology/praxis as 'the struggle for the recovery of India's dignity, self-respect and soul', 'a life long preoccupation with the Indian, especially Hindu, regeneration'; as 'subordina(ing) the goal of Hindu self-reaffirmation to the goal of superficial Hindu-Muslim 'reconciliation'' and/or as 'put(ing) aside the issue of the pre-eminence of Hindu civilization because he was convinced that Hindus needed first to overcome their weakness'; as occupying a strangely paradoxical place in the history of Indian nationalism, 'politically central, culturally insignificant', 'a hinge' between the 'two conceptual languages' which emerged in Indian culture through colonialism (namely, the Western educated intelligentsia or 'new elites' and the indigenous subaltern classes) rather than 'the creator of a culture of mutual translation'; the 'moment of maneuver' in the passage of nationalist thought, consisting in 'the historical consolidation of the 'national' by decrying the 'modern', the preparation for expanded capitalist production by resort to an ideology of anti-capitalism' and whose 'unique achievement' lay in 'its ability to open up the possibility for achieving perhaps the most

important historical task for a successful national revolution in a country like India, namely, the political appropriation of the subaltern classes by a bourgeoisie aspiring for hegemony in the new nation-state'; a 'passive revolution', a 'deferred revolution'; '(h)istorically (Ö) the first successful attempt by an Indian to solve the dichotomy between tradition and modernity, as distinct from the partial, short-lived movements initiated by such men as Ram Mohan Roy and Vivekananda', a dialectic 'transform(ing) the traditional value-system and ultimately surpass(ing) it', 'a transitional modality capable of development; indeed, it has to develop, irrespective of its earlier association with Hinduism, if Indian society is to accomplish its own secularization'; a 'non-rationalist theory of rationality', having as its basis the most basic truth about selves and meanings, the practice, that is, of a kind of 'transcendental (read, advaitic) reduction', prepossessing the self as truly Self, as never properly an object (and consequently never to be possessed) and as going back to its Self, its foundation (by relinquishing its attachment to itself) - the Gandhian concept of self as 'avoid(ing) the simplistic western sociological operation' of 'abolish(ing) the self in community (gemeinschaft)', the self in the Gandhian community 'com(ing) to terms with the other, without annihilating the other or itself', 'through a process of continuous structuring and de-structuring of itself', 'a system in which men are, as it were, relatively more free within a relatively less free context of politics'; a philosophy of action that 'can be seen as being 'this worldly' while the reason for this 'action in the world' is essentially

because of 'other worldly' considerations' - the point being that 'the non-coercive ideal that was to pave the way for 'liberation' was preached by Gandhi but what he practiced was often a more coercive form of non-violent direct action that did not always seem to take cognizance of the oneness of humanity, but rather aimed at achieving a desired short term worldly goal', in short, that 'when Gandhi's techniques proved politically successful they were in fact often failures of his spiritual ideology'; an ethic 'producing a transcultural protest against the hyper-masculine world-view of colonialism', as 'enumerating that the East and West could—and did—meet outside the bounds of modernity', that 'freedom is indivisible, not only in the popular sense that the oppressed of the world are one but also in the unpopular sense that the oppressor too is caught in the culture of oppression'; as a thought oriented 'towards a normal civilization', 'the living thought of one who would not under any condition settle for anything less than the very truth of man's life and destiny'; and so forth.

So, then, what do we have here? It is striking that far from confronting an absence of an intellectual tradition of coping with Gandhi, we have to contend with a sheer multiplicity of engagements. Gandhi, it seems, has been situated and re-situated many times over (may be not as our question, but certainly as a question). One is therefore, in rendering Gandhi, bound to perceive oneself in an implacable situation. The engagements called attention to above, in their sheer compulsive enormity and contradiction, are a pointer to the resistance in Gandhi, a testimony

also, at once, to the resistance which Gandhi offers thought (as well as testifying to the bases of the 'resistance' to Gandhi). Gandhi, to be sure, represents a body - some might wish to affirm it as spirit, but really Gandhi is more body than spirit, or better still, transcending the division body-spirit - that never ceased to transit, thinking, living, writing, along several mutual and contradictory registers and alternating between various planes of immanence—body, health, struggle, prayer; politics, economics, culture, ecology; religion, sexuality, 'salvation'—each and all being part and constitutive of his affectivity. And yet, this body, when placed by itself, in doubling back and again on itself, risks another reference. To speak of Gandhi, from these engagements with Gandhi, multiple and heterogeneous as they might be, is ultimately to bear a question about Gandhi: to look at it, through it, within it.

To be sure, Gandhi inhabits a particular space between reason and what is beyond the principle of reason, deploying, in his words, 'the language of politics' but 'really try(ing) to offer a glimpse of dharma' (cited in Saran 1980: 723).<sup>4</sup> Interpreters have attempted to lend dimension to this complexity, with Nandy (1987: 114-16) for one formulating Gandhi as a 'critical traditionalist', an entity advancing a critique of modernity from 'outside', from within a 'traditional' frame, and yet willing to criticize some traditions violently ('even include[ing] in his frame elements of modernity as critical vectors') and Parekh (1989b), for another, appropriating the notion of satyagraha and the use of the political fast for what is termed Gandhi's 'non-rationalist theory of

rationality'. All the same, and precisely because of the insistence upon there being something that is susceptible to all these (and such other) contextual explorations, the working through that AK Saran is concerned to effect vis-a-vis Gandhi keeps coming back. In his words (and I shall quote at some length):

Gandhi's critique of modern Western civilization is . . . peripheral to his thinking. Gandhian thinking strives to participate in the transcendental Centre; it is concerned with the destiny of Man, not with the prospects of a given civilization, hence its explosive stance. Once this is firmly grasped, it will be easy to discover the essential texts and context of Gandhian thinking; and if this happens, the enterprise of reducing Gandhian thinking to an 'alternative model' may come to an end, hopefully, once and for all. Gandhi could never be concerned with models, futures, scenarios, utopias or phantasies. His one and only concern was Truth to which he demanded absolute commitment (Saran 1980: 681-82).

What this amounts to saying is that for any thought of Gandhi to be plausible, as indeed for Gandhi himself, it must in the final analysis be linked to necessity, to necessary Being—the destiny of Man as such—and not to mere contingency, to what is merely possible and/or obtaining.<sup>5</sup> Such being the case, one may formally denominate Gandhian thinking as a thought of centre, a desire for and a return to centre, a centre within, as well as around us (more within than around us). Recall Gandhi: 'It is swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves'; 'Government over self is the truest swaraj; it is synonymous with moksha or salvation' (cited in Saran 1980: 693 and 720; the former is from Ch.14 of *Hind Swaraj*).<sup>6</sup>

## ANOTHER ENGAGEMENT

Now, of course, any gesture of 'situation', of situating and re-situating, is critical to all practice. But I must also insist that the procedure cannot usurp the place of practice, as many gestures of 'situation' are prone to do. In this wake, let us come back to our question concerning what is to know, or to have known Gandhi—more directly, of approaching, and being approached by, the resistance which Gandhi offers thought. By way of broad parameters of an answer, we can offer the following grounds of appraisal: Gandhi, Gandhian resistance, in the broadest sense, is the crystallization of *archetypal* values, those demanding on our part discernment, the sense of the real, attachment to the truth, justice, thus also humility; and contemplation, the sense of the sacred, inwardness, holiness, thus also charity—being founded on a certain subjectivation of the will (*vide* the allusion above: 'Government over self is the truest swaraj; it is synonymous with moksha or salvation'; 'It is swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves'), while not reducible to the phenomena of 'the will' (*vide*, say, the Nietzschean resistance: 'To become what one is').<sup>7</sup> This is perhaps why the terms 'oneself', 'the other' in itself, from whose absolute origins spring swaraj, have another meaning in Gandhi—quite apart from their 'efficacy' as instruments in the service of a politics.

I mentioned *archetypal* - Gandhi, Gandhian resistance, as the crystallization of archetypal values. Let me try to explain. The rendering may yet offer a way of reconciling Gandhi's theism, that 'glimpse of dharma' he is trying to offer, with his 'politics',

for, as Charles Taylor (1989: 288) has maintained,

in this outlook, (events) are linked through something outside history, where their symbolic affinity reflects some deeper identity in regard to Divine Providence. Something other than their causal relations in time connects them; in spite of the immense temporal gap, there is a sense in which they are simultaneous. History embodies the extratemporal.<sup>8</sup>

Accordingly, this sense of what it is to exist in time may be held to embody a personal morality, or, better still, a political morality of everyday life—the way, for instance, the question of God is really for Gandhi, apropos his ‘God is Truth’ and ‘Truth is God’—as well as framing a mode of consciousness (one not entirely unconnected with the political affirmation of everyday life that finds resonance in Gandhi) that both transcends the historical and poses the question of the historical.<sup>9</sup> Nandy’s remarks provide a variation on this point, and can be cited in full:

One reason why Gandhi aroused deep anxieties in Indian middle-class literati was that he always pushed social analysis to the level of personal life-style, to the level of what can be called the smaller forces of history. Gandhi did not allow the rhetoric of historical awareness to be a substitute for the political morality of everyday life. He was willing to suspend his suspicion of history, but he was unwilling to let anyone forget one’s personal responsibility to live out one’s understanding of historical and/or perennial truths. This terribly, terribly fuddy-duddy demand for internal consistency—between the public and the private, and between the collective and the personal—is particularly anxiety-provoking to those who specialize in speaking the language of making history while only passively living in history (1987: 112).

Although entirely ‘modern’, this is a step beyond the ‘exploration of order through personal resonance’ that finds strong endorsement in Taylor: ‘We are now in an age in which a publicly accessible cosmic order of meanings is an impossibility. The only way we can explore the order in which we are set with an aim to defining moral sources is through this part of personal resonance’ (1989: 512). The latter axis, it seems to me, avoids the opening-up to the space of the historical which finds expression in the Gandhian allusion ‘us(ing) the language of politics’ but ‘really try(ing) to offer (-) a glimpse of dharma’.

To transpose the axis of this rendering further, the focus in Gandhi is less the mode of being of history than the axiomatic of a certain identification with time, the ebb and flow of the present. We cannot, on that ground, construct Gandhi as antipodal, that is, as a point or a place diametrically opposite to another and/or as the surface of another body or sphere.<sup>10</sup> Not only because—as was maintained earlier in the quotation from Saran—Gandhi could never be concerned with models, futures, scenarios, utopias or phantasies; but also because, and this is important, Gandhi at no point in his quest underrates the resources of *modern* moral reflection. My statement is advised, induced partly no doubt by Taylor’s magisterial reading, but not only, as we shall see.<sup>11</sup>

Gandhi’s incorporation of Tolstoy, Ruskin, and Thoreau, of the *Sermon on the Mount* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, as the very basis of his resistance needs no labouring. Likewise, his denunciation of modern Western civilization, ‘a civilization only in name’ as he put it in the *Hind Swaraj*,

is loud and clear.<sup>12</sup> But what Gandhi cannot denounce, and indeed does not denounce, is moral authority—modern, non-modern, or whatever—a claim, at once, about the universality of ‘action’, of human ‘doing’, and which avoids the over-valuation of reason. Of course, any over-valuation of reason is dangerous—and not just for Gandhi—because its clearest form is merely a method of calculation, useful perhaps for discovering means to ends, but quite inapplicable to the assessment of ends themselves.<sup>13</sup> It is broadly in keeping with this parameter that Gandhi grounds ‘action’, human ‘doing’, in a non-contingent morality (Truth, non-violence, God). But it must be noted that this grounding does not quite parallel the (modernist?) tendency to regard all values as arbitrary and/or to be given up when faced with conflicts among them; nor is it, for that matter, strictly traditional. A ‘non-rationalist theory of rationality’? A ‘critical traditionality’? - to echo Parekh (1989b) and Nandy (1987) respectively. I am not so sure, although it seems appropriate to venture here an elliptical formulation, namely, the idea that the space of Gandhi does not know modernity, but knows itself as ‘modern’—not the discourse of modernity or of a being-for-modernity, but the difference between the two.

What we have been pressing hard to formulate in the preceding paragraphs poses deep questions, not always anticipated in the discussion of the terms of the modern identity. The juxtaposing of ‘action’, of human ‘doing’, alongside a non-contingent morality—as well as the grounding of the former on the latter—turns, it seems to me, on the deeper implications of the

contingent - non-contingent relation. If for the sake of argument, the former, namely, the universality of 'action', of human 'doing', were taken to be marked by an element of contingency—as reflected, for instance, in the incommensurability between the purposes of the action and the actual series of consequences entailed by the intervention—then it must entail that the application to contingent problems of a non-contingent morality introduces into the latter an element of contingency as well. Note this is not quite to posit that the non-contingent is contingent, not even to render it compatible with contingency. Rather, it is to indicate towards a condition in which (and by which) the non-contingent could be rendered adaptable to changing conditions (or could render adaptable changing conditions), always provided that the 'adaptation' proceed from, or translate into, first principles which never change. In short: a reduction of all activities to their principles, the principles themselves being modifiable and yet not reducible to the (ir) modification. This, incidentally, turns out to be an implication folding into Gandhi's insistence on the integrality of means and ends. It remains a moot question whether this insistence were constitutive of a framework of thinking which viewed means and ends as parts of a whole which has transcendent reference, or issues from another circumstance not altogether transcendental? Saran is concerned to bolster the former, whereas the latter finds resonance in our pages.

There is thus, in Gandhi, across the contexts of his resistance, an encompassing sense of the right over the good: of (read, moral) obligation over (purely subjective expressive)

fulfillment. The dynamics of this encompassment are complex and manifold, involving always himself and his 'self' (*vide* his 'experiments with truth', and/or the subjective symbolism of the self called attention to above, Gandhi as transcending the division body-spirit) and also implicating such other 'contexts' as British colonialism, modern Western civilization, 'partition', Hindu-Muslim relations, the question of untouchability, the situation of women, dalits and the peasantry, and so on. Again, it is not as if the 'good'—the requirements of a fulfilled or valuable or worthwhile life—is denied or not given its due, not even that the self now aspires for something beyond human powers (that would be hubris). Rather, Gandhi's position seems to be that the discharge of our tasks and duties, the content of our obligation, whatever they may be, is itself and already a celebration of the good. The position also translates into the 'Way of Works' of the *Bhagavad Gita*—where to fulfil one's own vocation, determined by one's own nature, without self-referent motives, is the way of perfection (*siddhi*). Interestingly—without, however, intending too fine a point—one may note that Gandhi hardly spoke of *siddhi*, delivering rather and mostly into *swaraj*, implying not merely political freedom, self rule, but always, principally, government over self. Of course, this norm of 'selfless' or 'detached' action which Gandhi posits as a kind of absolute also translates into what I have been calling attention to as subjectivation of the will (as distinct from, we can say, the self-assertion of the will). Gandhi, Gandhian resistance, thus understood, is no longer a matter of doing specifically only on particular

occasions, but of resisting—a resisting resistance, in our phrase.

There are of course more issues to be faced, although in the foregoing we were also interested to offer a certain characterization. We must yet ask of this resisting resistance a further question about its locus of effectivity.

#### AT THE LIMIT

A particularly problematical sector of the Gandhian oeuvre is what the phenomenon records, namely, the discovery of a centre, what we have been concerned to deliver as a desire of/for and a return to centre. Saran, to whom we owe aspects of this formulation, constructs this centre as one wholly beyond modern Western Civilization, what he terms, following others, 'Primordial Tradition'. Saran is willing to concede 'moralistic and modernistic sentimental strains' in Gandhi's thought, and at one point even hints 'the possibility that Gandhi did not fully penetrate to the roots of the imperialism inherent in modern thought' (1980: 712). To be sure, our reminder above that at no point in his quest did Gandhi underrate the resources of modern moral reflection was neither meant to endorse this interpretation nor to complicate it—not even to invent or—discern a wholly 'new' axis for Gandhi. Be that as it may, we have sought to record a certain movement within the Gandhian matrix—an axiomatic of return really—issuing from the world around us and in quest of a centre for us. It is precisely this axiomatic that we shall have to decipher, partly as a coming to terms and partly as a determination of its locus of effectivity.

Who could deny that the Gandhian matrix is overly religious

and non-mythological (being moral—and not, note, the other way round, religious and therefore moral)<sup>14</sup> and that from the specific instance of today—the problems of today—the resistance it marks may well be the condition for a repoliticization, even perhaps of another practice of the political? Saran's entire essay is, in a sense, oriented towards this latter end; and that it suffers also on that account cannot be gainsaid.<sup>15</sup> I am also struck by some characteristic correspondences between, again, the Gandhian oeuvre and certain emerging configurations of our present—not just the so-called 'incredulity towards metanarratives' (of History, Progress, Totality, and so on) nor even the general crisis of universalism (whatever that means), but also in terms of the instituting terms of politics today, namely, of identity, identification and social reconstruction, issues dear, it needs no reiterating, to Gandhi. Interestingly, these strategies record phenomena peculiar to the post-colonial Indian state today. That these processes, in their intersection and contradiction, have to be all contending with Gandhi, with not just his legacy but also his memory has its own story to tell. One can perhaps consider this story elsewhere (although for a certain straightening of the historical record, see Nanda 1985).

All the same, the axiomatic in which the Gandhian oeuvre is delivered, and delivers itself, namely, a return to centre (the centre might yet be multiple—'concentric', 'oceanic', in Gandhi's idiom—but a return, at any rate) leaves me perplexed and undecided. Could it have to do with, to echo Ahmad (1993: 238), 'a certain strand of obscurantist indigenism which

unfortunately surfaced in Gandhi's thought much too frequently; ... and which still live today, in many forms, under the insignia, always, of cultural nationalism and opposed, always, to strands of thought derived from Marxism'? I am afraid not; and, in fact, to acknowledge so would be to ignore the whole politics of Gandhi's assassination (on the latter, see Nandy (1980: 70-98). Accentuating my state of indecision is also the idea of human perfectibility impinging on Gandhi—from which he issues and to which he returns (again, the motif of return)—although yes, as I am increasingly coming round to accept, a world-view recognizing the evil inherent in human nature need not be an alternative vision either. Indeed, the utopianism that the latter was meant to resist might yet not escape it, even rendering itself, one can say, messianic. Further delineation would presuppose views grounded in metaphysics and theology, but I must deny, all the same, the binarism—human perfectibility versus problem of evil—in terms of which these views are often expressed. Again, it is not as if modernity is incapable of offering a theory of or a perspective on evil. We need also recognize that the uses to which a practical and/or theoretical orientation have been put (or could be put) depend entirely upon the horizon of possibilities defining a context. Nonetheless—and this is important—there is the problem of reconciling how anybody could be 'instrumental' about Gandhi; also, whether—and in what ways—one could be 'ideological' with him (which is not of course to deny the several instrumental and ideological appropriations of him, or to divest Gandhism of its material coordinates). There is something in the

Gandhian oeuvre for everybody—Marxists, feminists, pacifists, dalits, moralists, fundamentalists, transcendental deductionists, cultural nationalists, secularists, constitution-alists, politicians, academicians, environmentalists, health faddists—which again prompts the question about its locus of effectivity.<sup>16</sup>

All this brings us back to that particular axiomatic in Gandhi, of the return in Gandhi. One may have to yield to a sort of perspectivizing here. The Gandhian desire of/for and return to centre, quite apart from the subjectivation of the will entailed by it, marks also a rethinking of community, not always as an enclosed and finished circle of meaning, one in which there is always a mediated return to the origin (the primordial tradition?), but as the sharing of words, senses and voices. Aside from the question of the various possible forms of sharing and dividing and of their knowing—Saran himself offers an account, not without its perplexities—it is important to note the impossible condition of the Gandhian desire of/for centre and return to centre: being captive to the contradiction between the desire to enlarge and complete the self by returning to centre and the imperative to maintain desire itself (without which the centre either cannot be pre-supposed or the movement towards it, a return to it, cannot be supported, or both).

This condition/contradiction might yet be the medium of the resistance that is Gandhi, and in that case would be illegitimate—from any quarter or perception—to reject its production. Matters, however, get a bit more complicated when the Gandhian centre is posited as—to quote Saran (1980: 681) again—

'wholly beyond the modern Western Civilization'. Is the 'beyond' necessarily 'outside', an absolute anteriority? Or else, is it that which comes 'after' (as, in a temporal sense, 'coming after') - in which case the Gandhian centre would have to be approached as 'modern', as beyond the modern Western Civilization, maybe, and yet *coming after* the modern Western Civilization. To be sure, the Gandhian axiomatic of a return to centre may yet avoid these difficulties, positing the 'beyond'—to which one returns (and keeps returning)—as an absolute anteriority (and that perhaps is the sense in which Saran is positing the *beyond*) one that comes before, superceding, sublating, what comes after; and, what is more, that this absolute anteriority, even if one were to formulate as *coming after* the modern Western Civilization, nonetheless comes behind it, and therefore, in a sense, before it. In perspective here is a certain spatial sense of 'after'—as 'what is placed behind'—so that the Gandhian centre perforce would have to be rendered as a continuous present, a happening in time (and not, note, the permanency of a becoming). Thus also our graft, in deference to Gandhi, as a resisting resistance, but one not strictly antipodal.

How are we to describe this situation: contradiction, paradox? I must hasten to add that the matter is not merely a question of the specific enabling histories with which Gandhi works (what, in his instance, has been rendered circuitous, being received only circuitously).<sup>17</sup> Indeed, behind the logical game of contradiction or paradox, and, strictly, over and above the histories of Gandhi's enabling condition, there is also the question of what the Gandhian axiomatic of

return is instituting—that a thinking of history requires a different thinking of time, a thinking of its spacing: of the form, that continuous present or resisting resistance, by which and in terms of which time is spaced, and which allows for happening as such, that is, as it happens. That heady mix, Gandhi's 'us(ing) the language of politics' but 'really try(ing) to offer (-) a glimpse of dharma', must really be approached in this light.

One must concede that this identification of Gandhi could leave us entirely perplexed. The possibility of an uncompromising ethics making for an uncompromising politics (and vice versa) raises issues of a foundational integrity that clearly goes beyond contemporary thought and practice [see also Bilgrami (2002) for a thoughtful commentary on the modality of this integrity]. It may be exclaimed in exasperation that not just the Gandhian moment is being delivered into impasse, indeed that the moment itself could be an impasse. But there is a consideration that I wish to introduce here. The question implicates 'history'—or better still, the dialectics of a certain temporalization of history—and includes the dimension of being historical today, what has been styled (in deference to Marx) 'the messianic without messianism' (Derrida 1994). All messianism - including 'the messianic without messianism' - go, it seems to me, with a certain promise, and therefore some vision of a history (or historicity) as future-to-come. Gandhi, Gandhism may yet be reconceived in this light; and some might even represent it as unabashedly messianic, with or without the 'messianism'. Nevertheless, if the

trajectories that I have sought to document and traverse in these pages have been grasped, Gandhi seems so outside—'wholly other', if you will—this modality. Must we then infer that the Gandhian option, being non-messianic, wholly other, is totally outside history, without a chance in the historical process (in keeping with the contention that we, our times, must be messianic, if one is to be in with a chance)? Or should it be concluded that the option, being wholly other and without promise (of a history-to-come, that is) is itself another promise being heralded: that in the geopolitics of the ideological stakes of the moment—between, yes, modernity, democracy and social justice—it is ultimately the resisting resistance of Gandhi that can show the way.

The issue, it needs no reiteration, is more than verbal, and not quite polemical either. It is not simply a matter of the 'representative space' from which one is speaking, of institutional power or ideological Eurocentricity; nor is it, for that matter, 'world-historical' (at least, not in the sense in which most would fashion their critique of the present). It would require, without doubt, an understanding of the post-imperial world, its sense and form, but it must also involve a comprehension of how we got here at all: that is to say, of the entire trajectory of 'development' or decolonization. It can seem that what we are advancing here concerns an as yet indeterminate 'us'. But suppose we let the questions stand, supposing that one can translate the 'we', then, by what means, and within what registers, must the situation be approached? Perhaps a final overture in the context of Gandhi could illuminate other grounds of engagement.

## A FURTHER THRESHOLD

Readers may or may not be right in seeing my determination as a sort of postcolonial fantasy, the recreation of an informed and yet singularly obstinate figure. That this might be viewed to be mimicking Gandhi, or rather enclosing aspects of his world, is only too obvious, but let us try to get beyond this contrivance. Some, finding our tone all too serious and personal, may even insist that this sits somewhat uneasily with the emphases being brought to bear upon the subject. The self-consciousness of it all issues from a more charged thought scheme.

It would appear that all questions of the order 'what is Gandhi?' and 'why Gandhi?' are implied by each other, for we cannot ask 'why' if we do not already know 'what'. Moreover, if the 'what' of our instance has been grasped, we are dealing with something more than a singular subject or pre-eminent being; we are dealing with a 'location', a locus of value, one wholly immanent and endlessly converting transcendence into immanence. So that: for any (or all) determination of what Gandhi is (or even 'why Gandhi?') must be affixed the question *what one is*. This, in the context of our rendering, was largely a matter of nesting Gandhi in Gandhi, without eschewing mediacy or in the process engendering another Gandhi, while at the same time arranging the work in a mode which, although abstaining from linear calculation, went from the 'known' to, not so much the 'unknown', but rather the 'susceptible'.

Now, if it is established that Gandhi is 'proper' to a determination of *what one is*—as also the converse, that a determination of what one is must attach itself to the

question 'what is Gandhi?'—it can still be asked 'how', or 'by whom finally'? The question, I am afraid, cannot be answered, for it is obvious that neither the tradition nor its concepts of 'one' or 'we' are homogeneous. Indeed, in a conjuncture where the dynamics of national aspiration have been increasingly complex and cross-cutting, where popular consciousness (or even 'common sense') has become too fragmented and diverse to be reconfined within any type of 'national' project, it would be impossible to attempt any such determination. And yet, in the strictest traditions of the locus we have been concerned to straddle here, it may be that we are always already determined, so that 'to become what one is' is also in this register to accept an ethical instantiation, a certain subjectivation of the will. I discern here the makings of a fascinating problematic—of a 'nation's' (given the supposition that any identity or identification presumes a national basis) relation to its moral sources, and, what is more, that this problematic cannot be delivered, in our context, from a location apart from Gandhi. The act of 'making-present', accordingly, is not only a way of weaving into, instancing Gandhi, but also visualizing the possibility of a historical construction.

In contemplating Gandhi, in delivering oneself into its 'moment'—certainly one of the major events in Indian history—it remains moot to ask whether the moment could be properly comprehended without reference to its 'religious' history; indeed, also whether the profanation intrinsic to our rendering, one that assures to Gandhi considerable flexibility and resource and renders

that figure accessible to *us*, the post-independence generation basically, constitutes a wearing-away of his (ultimately 'Hindu') inheritance. Access to such a question honestly would escape a lot of us. But I suspect that we would need to move away to find a place at some remove in order to contend with the ultimate ends of these questions, as well as an idea of the generative laws of our discourse. It is thus not enough to say or ask oneself what Gandhi is; we must also give body to any sort of deadlock that one may experience vis-à-vis the framing. While this might fuzz the moral focus for some cleverly achieved ambiguity, the ambiguity itself might be in need of a re-telling, a moral re-stating.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. This paper has been with me for some years now and even has gone through successive recasting. It has not been formally published in an academic journal, though. In venturing to do so now, in an editorially revised format, I am complying more with the wishes of friends than adhering to some internal urge. I have more or less outgrown its concerns, although some very recent discussions of Gandhi—such as those of Bilgrami (2002) and Hardiman (2003)—have rekindled my interest in the figure. Coming to terms intellectually and emotionally with Gandhi requires, at once, a process of preparation and mediation sifting through various registers.
2. A certain sensitivity towards the positing and instituting of planes of immanence can be had from Deleuze and Guattari (1994: part I).
3. These renderings—as also the ones alluded to in the next paragraph—have been drawn from the following: Amin, (1989, pp. 1-61); Chatterjee (1986, esp. Ch. 4); Parekh (1989a and 1989b); Zaehner (1966, pp. 170-186); Roy, (ed.) (1986 and 1996); Fox (1989); Pantham and Deutsch, ed. (1986), especially the essays by Dalton, Rothermund, Terchek, Pantham and Nandy; Jain (1994, pp. 51-

- 3 and passim); Doctor (1994); Nandy (1983, pp. 48-63 and passim); Lannoy (1971, pp. 373-411); Iyer (1973); Hick and Hempel, ed. (1989); Saran (1980); Shah (1996); Hart (1994); Baxi and Parekh, ed. (1995), especially the essays by Parel, Brown and Pantham; Rudolph and Rudolph (1967); Radhakrishnan, ed. (1956); Brown (1990); Nanda (1985); Alter (1996); Weber (1994); Kaviraj (1994, pp. 320-26); Nagaraj (1993, esp. 1-30). I have resisted the idea of combing through these various assimilations, and shall presently come to weave my way through some of them. They implicate an entire apparatus of reading within which Gandhi is 'realized', while also rendering plausible our exercise of making-present Gandhi. Strictly, something other than the textuality of these renderings is in contention here, as we shall see.
4. Gandhi here is calling attention to his *Hind Swaraj*, but pressing a determination that cannot be limited to this pronouncedly political locus.
  5. Cf. also Chatterjee: 'What appears on the surface as a critique of Western civilization is (-) a total moral critique of the fundamental aspects of civil society. It is not, at this level, a critique of Western culture or religion, nor is it an attempt to establish the superior spiritual claims of Hindu religion. In fact, the moral charge against the West is not that its religion is inferior, but that by wholeheartedly embracing the dubious virtues of modern civilization it has forgotten the true teachings of the Christian faith. At this level of thought, therefore, Gandhi is not operating at all within the problematic of nationalism. His solution too is meant to be universal, applicable as much to the countries of the West as to nations such as India' (1986, p. 93). Although there is a striking correspondence between these two sets of claims, it is the former (namely, Saran) who, it seems to me, affords possibilities for negotiation which are somehow contained or deflected within the latter. Chatterjee, we need note, is especially concerned to establish the ideological intent behind Gandhi's efforts, as well as to posit the historical consequence of this effort; and, therefore, remains an enterprise bound up with the tasks of a modern Indian historiography - in part issuing from the Subaltern Studies collective. I cannot clarify this issue here, but see the arguments that follow.
  6. That other allusion from Gandhi, namely, of 'us(ing) the language of politics' but 'really try(ing) to offer (-) a glimpse of dharma', we shall presently come to inhabit, although I need add that this restriction to a specific order of phrases must seem strange (not to say, paradoxical) for a figure whose *Collected Works* run into about a hundred thick volumes. But this is all I am capable of, although I must admit to a certain effort at scanning the three volumes of Gandhi's writings edited and put together by Iyer (1986-87), especially Volume I, on 'Civilization, politics and religion'; the other two volumes being 'Truth and non-violence' and 'Non-violent resistance and social transformation'.
  7. I am here adapting for my purpose characterizations effected in another context, namely, Schuon (1990, p. 99). Note, in formulating the above lines, Schuon is specifying the categories 'subject' and 'object' and attesting to their, in his words, 'spiritual significance'. Strangely, and perhaps none-too-surprisingly, in the few lines that he devotes to Gandhi, Schuon is most ambivalent about Gandhi, appropriating him as 'a genius in complete possession of his centre' and yet 'a borderline case from the standpoint of sanctity' (Ibid, p. 31). Against this background, one might juxtapose the views of Niebuhr, who, in claiming that Gandhi had at times confused nonviolent resistance with non-resistance, noted that this 'is a pardonable confusion in the soul of a man who is trying to harmonize the insights of a saint with the necessities of statecraft, a very difficult achievement' (cited in Weber 1994, p. 196, emphasis added). The personality—and, I need add, the peculiarity—of the Nietzschean 'will' is best captured in Miller's (1994) stunning biography of Foucault.
  8. Note, Taylor is here gesturing at the word 'archetype', and in the context of recording the shifts in what he formulates as 'the culture of modernity' – the latter as announcing the death of archetypes, which in turn brings with it a new time-consciousness (Ibid., p. 286-87).
  9. Ram Chandra Gandhi (1986, pp. 31-43) has some proposals, if one is willing to be patient with his advaitic 'obsessions'. The question also implicates the issue of Gandhi's secularism—a deep, difficult and volatile matter. I hope to return to the question some day.
  10. Ram Chandra Gandhi (1986, pp. 31-43) may have a point after all—about the 'possibility' and the 'importance' of an 'advaitic understanding' of Gandhi. See also Hart (1994, pp. 155-58).
  11. It seems imperative to make do with Taylor's reminder: 'Modernity is often read through its least impressive, most trivializing offshoots' (1989, p. 511). He also speaks of 'the oversimple and almost caricatural readings of one or other strand of modernity' and that '(s)uch readings make various facets of modernity seem easy to repudiate'; while observing: 'Those who flaunt the most radical denials and repudiations of selective facets of the modern identity generally go on living by variants of what they deny' (pp. 503-04).
  12. Interestingly, this is not the only meaning of 'civilization' which resonates in Gandhi. Especially in Ch.6 of the *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi writes - considering 'what state of things is described by the word 'civilization'' – 'Its true test lies in the fact that people living in it make bodily welfare the object of life'. And besides, there is also that delightful response from Gandhi, when asked by a Western journalist about what he thought of modern civilization – 'a good idea', he had replied—to contend with. The line figuring in our main text is the penultimate sentence of Ch.5 of *Hind Swaraj*.
  13. For Gandhi's 'subversion' of the means-end schema, see Saran (1980, pp. 699-704), although, given our terms, one must be wary of the 'traditional-modern' contrast configuring this (namely, Saran's) aspect of the discussion.
  14. Something of the order of this recognition also underlies, I think, Chandra (1995, pp. 3142-46) who, in the course of reviewing Bhikhu Parekh's *Colonialism, tradition and reform* (1989a), observes: 'That even today, and in the analysis of a refined and self-conscious Indian scholar, Gandhi should be inscribed within the narrow confines of Hindu tradition, as it came to be constructed under the pressure of the imperialist western discourse, is reason enough for an introspective look at our post-colonial

- predicament' (p. 3146). We would diverge from such a summation nevertheless, for on our register a certain grounding in moral questions is imperative for approaching Gandhi. Only then can one face up to the implications of the histories (to be) addressed.
15. For another articulation, see Visvanathan (1992). The final section of this piece poses in stark terms Gandhi's practice of the political, which is imaginatively redeployed both for and in the context of, the struggle over Narmada. Our strategy of making-present - as distinct from, say, reinventing Gandhi - could fold into this circumstance, but it might yet deflect. Visvanathan's point about confronting 'the failure of the ethical to be convincingly political' (1992, p. 57) resonates Gandhi, no doubt. But there is, however, that allusive 'us(ing) the language of politics' but 'really try(ing) to offer (-) a glimpse of dharma' which must also be engaged.
  16. And that is why I think asking questions of Gandhi and Gandhians—like, for instance, Yadav (1993) does—although not entirely misplaced is in a deep-seated way incomplete.
  17. See the section entitled 'Influences and books read' of the writings of Gandhi compiled by Iyer (1986-87, Vol 1, pp. 66-199), and one should be in a position to infer what I am getting at. The body of engagements recounted in our first section is also emblematic of this register.
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## Self-Experience of Birth: Abortion Debate Revisited

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In this essay, I propose to make the purview of the debate on abortion—which in its expansionistic splurge made assumptions, logical, epistemological, and even metaphysical,<sup>1</sup> which it could not steadily carry along with it—thinner by arguing how, for epistemological reason, we cannot even draw strong moral conclusion, either for or against, about abortion, if morality is understood as a discipline of approving and disapproving.

Following a brief discussion on the logical impossibility of not having self-experience of birth, the essay shows how we cannot draw strong moral conclusions about abortion, either for or against, hence the need to accept the moderate position, which in my case is not accepted 'out of frustration' but for epistem-

ological reasons. The essay concludes by defending the moderate position from the menace of relativism.

### SELF-EXPERIENCE OF BIRTH:

Birth and death are two important aspects surrounding abortion as it is the possibility of birth that is sought to be terminated. Moral judgments on abortion are different from and are more serious than other moral judgments such as right, obligation, freedom, liberty, etc. One of the distinguishing factors is that abortion concerns the very beginning of human existence, whereas the other moral issues are add-ons to human beings. While it may be true that foetus is not yet a person hence can be terminated, however, the fact

remains that foetus is the necessary requirement from which the person develops. However, not all who are born become persons, but a person comes into existence only because of his or her birth. Further, there is no other source outside foetus for human existence.

This constitutive, though not complete relation between foetus and person has to be recognized by the pro-choice group, who mostly see their relation to be discrete rather than continuous.<sup>2</sup> The pro-life, on the other hand, indulges in over determination when they argue that foetus is already a person. They superimpose a potentiality or a possibility, namely personhood, on foetus, thus freezing and neutralizing time, thereby a future possibility is treated as already actualized.<sup>3</sup> I reject

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