

Reading Gandhiji in Two Tongues

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Gandhiji records the deep embarrassment with which he admitted to his Theosophist friends in London that he had read the *Gita* neither in Sanskrit nor in Gujarati. He said; "They talked to me about the *Gita*. They were reading Sir Edwin Arnold's translation-*The Song Celestial*- and they invited me to read the original with them. I felt ashamed, as I had read the divine poem neither in Sanskrit nor in Gujarati.¹ He read the *Gita* first in translation and only then in Sanskrit and Gujarati. His acquaintance with the life of Buddha was also through Sir Edwin's biography; *The Light of Asia*. This experience was not unusual. He was reflecting what was a common experience of many young men of India in the later half of the nineteenth century. Acquaintance with one's own culture, with tradition, history and religion through the medium of English language and Western education was a common feature of colonial cultural exchange. It was as if one defined oneself through the English eyes and in the English language. However, we are not concerned here with the impact of colonialism on Gandhiji or his responses to it. Our primary concern is with the act of translation. In this we shall have to deal with Gandhiji's reading of the Western Civilization.

Gandhiji was a serious student of languages. He believed that as a leader he ought to communicate with the people in their own languages. Gandhiji read and wrote three languages with certain degree of ease. Gujarati, his mother tongue, English and Hindi, which he hoped would become the national language of India. His lifelong quest was to be able to communicate with the people of India in their own tongues and in their own idioms. He therefore made serious attempts to learn various Indian languages. When he was in South Africa he tried to learn Tamil and Telugu, two languages from South India. In fact he published his weekly newspaper *The Indian Opinion* in Gujarati and English and it often carried certain pages in Tamil and Telugu. He learnt

Hindi, Urdu and Bangla. Even on the morning of his assassination he had his Bangla lessons. He could sign his name in fourteen Indian languages.

We must also remember that Gandhiji was a translator. He translated Tolstoy, Ruskin and Plato's *Defence of Socrates* into Gujarati. He also rendered into English his most important philosophical work *Hind Swaraj*. Gandhiji is also one of the most translated writers of Gujarat. He commissioned translations of his books and writings into English. He supervised and authenticated most translations of his work. After his death all his writings, speeches, letters and conversations have been published in 100 volumes of the *Collected Works Of Mahatma Gandhi* (CWMG). The CWMG is available in three languages; Gujarati, English and Hindi. Thus, the process of translation of his works went on much after his death and continues even today.

The attempt here will be to understand how Gandhiji translated certain key philosophical concepts. This would allow us to understand not only his philosophy but also his understanding of the method of translation, its possibilities and limitations. We will have to use certain Gujarati terms in the process, which I hope to be able to clarify in closest English equivalent.

Translation fundamentally is a process of communicating meaning across languages, cultures, intellectual traditions and time. It was no different for Gandhiji.

Let us take one example. He was in South Africa when the Transvaal Government proposed changes in the Asiatic Act. The changes made registration of all Asiatics compulsory and demanded that all Asiatics submit impressions of all their fingers, a clause that was seen as humiliating and degrading. Gandhiji was a practising Barrister and a very successful one at that. He was trained in Western Law and Jurisprudence; he used English language in courts and in all public discourses in South

Africa. It would have been easy for him to understand the implications of the new law in English. His response is fascinating. Describing the process he says; "I took the Transvaal Government Gazette Extraordinary of August 22, 1906 in which the Ordinance was published, home from the office. I went up a hill near the house in the company of a friend and began to translate the draft Ordinance into Gujarati."² This is remarkable. A Britain trained barrister practising law in South African colony translates a legal ordinance into his mother tongue in order to comprehend the true significance of it! What does this signify? He knew that the Ordinance was intended for the Asiatic community, particularly the Indians. Although drafted in legal language its implications were to be deeply cultural. The cultural significance of this document could be grasped only in the language of the people it was aimed at. The humiliation inherent in that cold, bureaucratic document could be internalised fully only in his own language. It was only after its translation not only in linguistic sense but also in a cultural sense that any effective opposition to it could be thought of. Thus for him translation was a process by which alien notions could be grasped, their meanings internalised and cultural responses to it could be offered.

Let us take another example of this process. This example deals with the question of the literary form of Autobiography. Autobiography in India is essentially a nineteenth century form. Its emergence was linked with two processes. One was the process of Western education. The second was the movement for social and religious reform that shook the second half of the nineteenth century in various regions of India. Western education brought to young university graduates Western notions of aesthetics, ethics, philosophy and social organisation. It also introduced them to the practice of writing history in the liner western sense. It also brought to them the idea that each person had a unique individual identity. The social and religious reform movement gave them the sense that the old order was changing and a new, modern and more progressive social order was about to emerge. They wanted to capture this process in literary forms. Two very powerful literary forms emerged in the nineteenth century India, the novel and the autobiography. In a culture, which had a long tradition of story telling and story writing novel as a form, did not pose many cultural problems. It was the autobiography, which was deeply troubling as a literary form. Major Indian philosophical systems had been advocating the self-effacement of individual. It was argued that only by the subjugation of the individual ego that the soul could be sublimated and could eventually be one with the Creator. In such a culture autobiography as a story of the

self was seen as introducing major cultural transitions. Therefore almost all individuals who wrote autobiographies in various Indian languages in the nineteenth century wrote about the difficulty of writing about the self in an alien form. They tried to resolve this tension by claiming that by writing the autobiography in their mother tongue they were modernising the literary tradition of their language.

When Gandhiji decided to write his autobiography in 1925 he had to face the same dilemma. How was he to speak about his life in a form that was seen as Western? Would he be endorsing the superiority of Western cultural modes by doing so? He narrates his perplexity; " But a God-fearing friend had his doubts, which he shared with me on my day of silence. ' What has set you on this adventure?' he asked. ' Writing an autobiography is a practice peculiar to the West. I know of nobody in the East having written one, except amongst those who have come under Western influence...Don't you think it would be better not to write anything like an autobiography, at any rate just as yet?'"³ Gandhiji's unnamed friend is advocating a familiar argument. Autobiography is a form peculiar to the colonisers and those Indians who were colonised. Why should Gandhiji the most creative opponent of the colonial culture attempt to write one and in the process endorse a Western practice?

Gandhiji's response to this criticism is most creative. He responded; " This argument had some effect on me. But it is not my purpose to attempt a real autobiography. I simply want to tell the story of my numerous experiments with truth...But I should certainly like to narrate my experiments in the spiritual field which are known only to myself, and from which I have derived such powers as I possess for working in the political field. If the experiments are really spiritual, then there can be no room for self-praise. They can only add to my humility."⁴

Gandhiji is at his creative best in this passage. He distinguishes between what he calls a real autobiography and an autobiography that he would write. A real autobiography is a Western form, a form that can lead to self-praise. But what he wanted to write was not that. His attempt would be to tell a story of his experiments with truth. These experiments were spiritual and moral. A narration of such experiments can only make him and his readers more aware of his limitations and would make him more humble. He takes the Western form of writing about the self and translates it in his own idiom. The Gujarati word for autobiographical writings is *Atmakatha*. The term 'Atmakatha' translates as not autobiography but as ' the story of the soul.' Gandhiji here is translating

a literary form. We are aware that autobiography in its origins is a Christian practice. In its original sense it was a story of a soul in search of God. Gandhiji by employing autobiography as *Atmakatha* opens up the possibility of speaking of his striving and pinning for self-realization, to see God face to face and to attain *Moksha*. As *Atmakatha* his story of the self would be authentically Indian, as it would speak of his spiritual and moral quest. No one before him or after him in the autobiographical tradition of India would succeed in writing an *Atmakatha*. There is an interesting transposition that happens in the actual act of translating Gandhiji's autobiography from Gujarati into English. In the original Gujarati the main title of the story is *Satya Na Prayogo*, which literally means experiments with truth. The word 'Atmakatha' appears as a subtitle. It signifies two things. One, that it is the story of experiments that is primary. Two, it has autobiographical context as these experiments were done by an individual. The title thus matches with what Gandhiji's original intention was. In the English translation the process is reversed. *An Autobiography* becomes the main title while "Experiments with Truth" is rendered as a subtitle. It indicates not a failure of translation, but a much deeper cultural failure. It indicates the difficulty of speaking about the soul in an alien tongue.

Gandhiji is also doing another act of translation in this process. The first act of translation was the transformation of the literary form itself. The second act of translation is that of the method. Gandhiji calls it experiments with truth. Let us focus on the word experiments first. Experiment is a method that is deeply associated with Western science. As a method experiment presupposes two aspects. One is the distance between the subject and the object or between the observer and the observed. Only when this separation between the subject and the object is attained Science emerges. This makes science value free and therefore universal. The second is dependent upon the first. An experiment, which is value free and where the distance between the subject and the object is attained leads to truth or a fact that can be verified. Thus an experiment is a method of arriving at truth. Experiments are not about truth they lead to what we regard as truth.

Gandhiji chooses to call his method experiments; even in Gujarati he uses the term *Prayogo*, which denotes experimentation. This choice of term is very significant. He had another term available from the spiritual tradition. This term is *Sadhana*. *Sadhana* is a difficult term to translate into English. It has been variously translated as spiritual practices, as penance and as striving. But Gandhiji consciously used the term *Prayogo*, experiments. He explains why the term experiment was

chosen over *Sadhana* in the following way. " There are some things which are known only to oneself and one's maker. They are clearly incommunicable. The experiments that I am about to relate are not such."⁵ He is saying that if his striving was such that it was communicable only to him and to his God they would be *Sadhana*. But the experiments that he was referring to were not such. He in fact refers to the scientific method. He says; " I claim for them nothing more than does a scientist who, though he conducts his experiments with the utmost accuracy, forethought and minuteness, never claims any finality about his conclusions, but keeps an open mind regarding them. I have gone through deep self-introspection, searched myself through and through, and examined and analysed every psychological situation...For me they appear to be absolutely correct, and seem for the time being to be final."⁶

Thus Gandhiji applies the Western scientific methods to his spiritual experiments. But he introduces a major transformation in the method. The scientific method necessarily implies division between the subject and the object to arrive at truth. But what Gandhiji requires is the scientific method without the separation. So he becomes both the subject and the object in search for truth. Thus he takes the Western scientific method and turns it into a spiritual practice by destroying the opposition between subject and object.

Gandhiji as a translator appears to be operating at various levels. He is doing translation to derive meaning, to alter a literary form and even to transform the scientific method. Now let us take an example where he seems to be suggesting the non-translatability of an intellectual discipline. The case that we shall take is that of history.

While Gandhiji was imprisoned at the Yeravda prison he decided to write a history. This was to be an account of the Satyagraha in South Africa. He wrote this account in Gujarati while in jail and called it *Dakshin Africa Na Satyagraha No Itihas*. Its exact translation in English would have to be " A History of Satyagraha in South Africa." This book was immediately translated into English by his close associate Valji Govindji Desai. This translation was read, verified and authenticated by Gandhiji. The term history itself was omitted from the title of the book. Why? It was clearly not an oversight. It was a deliberate choice. The title of the book in English reads *Satyagraha in South Africa*. To understand the omission of the term history we will have to understand the meaning that he attached to two terms; the Gujarati term *Itihas* and the English term History. Gandhiji in fact saw these two as separate. *Itihas* was not History for him. In his book the *Hind Swaraj* there is a fascinating discussion about the historical evidence of what he calls soul-force or

Satyagraha. His argument was that soul-force was the basis of the world. Brute-force was an aberration and a break in the even flow of soul-force. It is here that he makes a fundamental difference between Itihas and History. He says that Itihas means; " It so happened."⁷ On the other hand for him history means the doings of kings and emperors. He says; " History, as we know it, is a record of the wars of the world, and so there is a proverb among Englishmen that a nation which has no history, that is no wars, is a happy nation. How kings played, how they became enemies of one another is found accurately recorded in history."⁸ Thus he makes a crucial distinction between Itihas and history. Itihas is for him a record of things as they happened. History on the other hand is a record of wars between kings and emperors. He therefore says that it is impossible for history to record instances of the use of Satyagraha or soul-force. He describes it beautifully; he says, " You cannot expect silver-ore in a tin mine."⁹ He thus could use the word Itihas in the Gujarati title of the book, but not in English as history was not for him a translation of the term Itihas. Itihas and history were two very different enterprises for him. History could not have recorded the events, which dealt with the advent and the use of soul-force. This shows that for Gandhiji translation is a philosophical problem. He was not willing to employ two terms as convertible terms, even if their usage had become customary if they for him represented two divergent traditions.

Let us take another example of this process. If there was a book that altered the course of his life in a definitive way it was John Ruskin's *Unto This Last*. In the autobiography he has described how he came under the 'magic spell of the book.' He read this book while on a train journey from Johannesburg to Durban. He has described the impact of the book in the autobiography. " The book was impossible to lay aside, once I had begun to read it. It gripped me. Johannesburg to Durban was a twenty-four hours' journey. The train reached there in the evening. I could not get any sleep that night. I determined to change my life in accordance with the ideals of the book."¹⁰ This book brought about 'instantaneous and practical' transformation in his life. He decided to move to a farm, establish a community there and live by bread-labour. Not everyone would have been similarly influenced. Gandhiji admits that the book by Ruskin reflected some of his own deepest convictions and hence it touched him. He has said this beautifully; " A poet is one who can call forth the good latent in the human breast. Poets do not influence all alike, for everyone is not evolved in an equal measure."¹¹ Gandhiji also decided to translate the book into Gujarati. It is not

a translation in the usual sense of the term. He rendered into Gujarati a paraphrase of the book. Through the Gujarati paraphrase he wanted to convey three principles that he had gleaned from the book. These were:

1. That the good of the individual is contained in the good of all.
2. That a lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's, inasmuch as all have the same right to earning their livelihood from their work.
3. That a life of labour, i.e., the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman, is the life worth living.¹²

In the preface of the translation he clarifies the purpose further. He wished to present a point of view counter to the utilitarian perspective that it was man's duty to promote the happiness of the greatest numbers. Happiness in this context was taken to be material happiness and economic prosperity. It was also held that if in pursuit of this happiness any moral laws were violated, it does not matter much. India too was in grip of such ideas, which according to Gandhiji was the cause of its ruin. He says; " We in India are much given nowadays to imitation of the West. We do grant that it is necessary to imitate the West in certain respects. At the same time there is no doubt that many western ideas are wrong."¹³ Gandhiji wanted to establish with the help of Ruskin's book that quest for material and physical for the majority has no sanction from the divine law. He agreed with Ruskin that one could not pursue happiness in violation of the moral law. Gandhiji said in the preface; " The summary of his work which we offer here is not really a translation. If we translated it, the common reader might be unable to follow some of the Biblical allusions, etc. We present therefore only the substance of Ruskin's work. We do not even explain what the title of the book means, for it be understood only by a person who has read the Bible in English."¹⁴ The title of Ruskin's book, *Unto This Last* is derived from Christ's parable of the Vineyard; where a man paid equal wages to all labourers regardless of the time they had spent working in his vineyard. When he was asked, he replied; " I will give unto this last, even as unto thee.' (Mathew xx.1-14) The meaning that both Ruskin and Gandhiji derived from this parable was that the relationship between the employer and the employee should not be one of profit or advantage but of justice. Gandhiji's transposition of this principle in Gujarati is a sign of his philosophical depth. The phrase *Unto This Last* would have been translated in Gujarati as *Antyodaya* or the welfare of the last person. Gandhiji does not translate it as *Antyodaya* but as *Sarvodaya*. *Sarvodaya* means 'welfare of all.' This was

the central idea of Gandhiji's economic thinking. He believed that a just social order required that each benefit equally. This was possible he argued only when people followed moral laws. Observance of morality in this case meant that human beings limit their material wants. If each were to pursue the path of material gain without the consideration of fellow beings it could result in exploitation and unjust system. Gandhiji's thinking not only influenced the translation of the title as *Sarvodaya* but other sections also. Ruskin's first chapter is called the 'Roots of Honour'; Gandhiji translated it as the 'Roots of Truth.' This again is based on his philosophy that truth was the foundation of human life. If the principal quest of a human being were truth it would automatically lead him to a moral path.

We find a similar pattern in his translation of Plato's *Defence of Socrates*. It is significant that Gandhiji was translating Ruskin and the *Defence of Socrates* almost simultaneously.¹⁵ The question that we must ask is, why was he doing these translations in this period. Gandhiji was engaged in fighting injustice in South Africa. In September of 1906 he had found a new method of protest. This method was called *Satyagraha* (we will deal with the history of this word and Gandhiji's search for its English equivalent a little later); it involved acceptance of suffering for the sake of truth. Gandhiji had to convince the Indian community in South Africa, which consisted largely of traders and indentured labour that it was their duty to undergo suffering even at the cost of their life for the sake of truth and justice. Gandhiji was looking for historical figures that had so sacrificed their lives for the sake of truth. Socrates was a natural choice. Gandhiji translated- again it was a paraphrase- of Plato's *Defence of Socrates*- for the readers of the *Indian Opinion*. We find the pattern repeating itself. Gandhiji called it 'Story of a Soldier of Truth.' Socrates is presented here as someone who laid down his life for truth. In fact, Gandhiji calls him a *Satyagrahi*.¹⁶ He wrote; "We must learn to live and die like Socrates. He was, moreover, a great *Satyagrahi*." He believed that if people out of fear of death or dishonour fail to either realize or examine their shortcomings India and Indians could never be free. India will have to cleanse itself and emerge pure. The only path of purity for Gandhiji was to sacrifice the self. He urges the readers to imbibe the deep sacrifice of Socrates. "We argued thus and saw in the words of a great soul like Socrates the qualities of an elixir. We wanted our readers, therefore, to imbibe a deep draught of it, so that they might be able to fight—and to help others fight- the disease. It is with this objective in mind that we summarize Socrates' speech."¹⁷

Thus Gandhiji's translations or paraphrases of Western

texts were largely motivated by not literary but philosophical and pragmatic considerations. It was his way of engaging with those aspects of Western philosophical tradition, which echoed his own thoughts.

But this process was not one sided. He was equally concerned with reaching out to the West. He knew that he was engaged not only in political dialogue with the West but a cultural and a civilizational dialogue as well. Let us elaborate this point.

Gandhiji believed that India was subjugated not by the British political power but primarily by modern Western civilization. The modern Western Civilization was for him characterised by a desire to increase bodily comfort and a search of meaning and fulfilment in physical pursuits. He said; " Its true test lies in the fact that people living in it make bodily welfare the object of life."¹⁸ This civilization for him was irreligious. He called it a satanic civilization and Black Age. A true civilization for him was that mode of conduct, which points to man the path of duty. Performance of duty and observance of morality were convertible terms. Observance of morality was possible only when we attain mastery over our minds and passions. It is by observing morality that we know our selves. Thus civilization for him opens up the possibility of knowing ourselves.

The other philosophical notion important to understand Gandhiji was what he calls the relationship between the means and the ends. He argued that means and ends were inviolably linked with each other. He also argued that it was not sufficient to have ends that were good and moral, the means to that end had also to be equally moral. His lifelong search was to find such moral means. The question before him was how to drive the British away from India. What means to employ for that. Many had argued in favour of armed opposition to the British. This was unacceptable to him. He believed that armed opposition or what he described as brute force were peculiar to the West. If India were to employ such means what it would get would be Western civilization without the British. If Indian civilization was moral the means adopted had to be moral. In South Africa he invented a method that came to be known as *Satyagraha*. Before we go on to the history of the term let us consider what it means. *Satyagraha* is a method of securing rights by self-suffering. When I refuse to do something that is repugnant to my conscience and accept punishment for disobedience I employ *Satyagraha*.

This was a new method. It required a word or a term that would capture its essence. Gandhiji himself could not come up with the name. When he was in South Africa he announced a competition for the readers of his weekly the *Indian Opinion* and sought suggestions. His close

associate and relative Maganlal Gandhi came up with a term *Sadagraha*. This term was composed of two terms Sad, meaning good or virtuous and agraha, meaning insistence. Thus the term *Sadagraha* meant insistence for the good and the virtuous. Gandhiji turned *Sadagraha* into *Satyagraha*, combining Sat, that is Truth and agraha. In the initial phase Gandhiji appeared uncertain about the efficacy and resonance of the term, he was also concerned about its translatability in English. He used four terms as mutually convertible terms. These were *Satyagraha*, Atmabal that is soul-force, Dayabal that is love-force and the English term passive resistance. Sometime he and others also used a term associated with Henry David Thoreau. The most peculiar term here is Dayabal or what he called love-force. He is employing the Christian idea of love and compassion and translating that into Gujarati as Daya. Daya in Gujarati and Sanskrit means compassion, Love would be translated as Prem. Gandhiji instead of translating love as Prem translates it as Daya and expands the meaning of the Gujarati phrase Daya.

His struggle with the term Passive Resistance is indicative of his deep philosophical anxiety to communicate the true essence of a term. He and others around him used the term passive resistance to denote *Satyagraha* in the initial years. In fact Gandhiji himself used the term passive resistance in his English translation of *Hind Swaraj*. But soon he began to be dissatisfied and disenchanted with the term passive resistance. He believed that passive resistance both historically and philosophically was different from *Satyagraha*. He became aware of the problem when a newspaper in Johannesburg described passive resistance as a weapon of the weak. The newspaper wrote; "The Transvaal Indians have had recourse to passive resistance when all other means of securing redress proved to be of no avail. They do not enjoy the franchise. Numerically, they are only few. They are weak and have no arms. Therefore they have taken recourse to passive resistance which is a weapon of the weak."¹⁹

Gandhiji says that he was taken by surprise by this description. He soon realised the implications of the term passive resistance. It implied that if the Indians were numerically stronger, had franchise and had arms they would have taken recourse to some other method and not opted for the 'weapon of the weak.' This forced Gandhiji to clarify the distinction between passive resistance and soul-force or *Satyagraha*. As Gandhiji went into the historical incidents associated with passive resistance the difference between *Satyagraha* and passive resistance became sharper. He realised that in the English social and political history passive resistance was

associated with the opposition of numerically weaker and disenfranchised people. Gandhiji also realised that in the recent past non-conformist Christians and women as part of the suffragette movement had employed passive resistance. He also realised that the non-conformists and the suffragists differed on the question of the use of physical force. The non-conformist would eschew the use of force even if it was a practical proposition while the suffragists were not averse to the use of physical force.

Gandhiji was absolutely certain that there was no place for brute force in the movement of the Indian people. No matter how badly the Indians suffered they would never use physical force. Passive resistance implied that when Indian gained in strength and learnt to use arms they would adopt more violent methods of protest. In Gandhiji's conception of *Satyagraha* there was not the slightest possibility of the use of arms. He said; " *Satyagraha* is soul force pure and simple, and whenever and to whatever extent there is room for the use of arms or physical force or brute force, there and to that extent is there so much less possibility for soul force."²⁰ Gandhiji realised that passive resistance and *Satyagraha* were antagonistic forces. Passive resistance offered the possibility of the use of arms, it can also be offered along with the use of arms. *Satyagraha* was an act of love according to Gandhiji. It could even be offered against the nearest and the dearest but passive resistance could not. Passive resistance did not preclude the possibility to harassing the other party. "While in *Satyagraha* there is not the remotest idea of injuring the opponent. *Satyagraha* postulates the conquest of the adversary by suffering in one's own person."²¹ Gandhiji was so convinced of the difference between passive resistance and *Satyagraha* that he challenged the widely held belief that Jesus Christ was the prince of passive resisters. He said; "Jesus Christ indeed has been acclaimed as the prince of passive resisters but I submit in that case passive resistance must mean *Satyagraha* and *Satyagraha* alone."²² Thus Gandhiji decided to use the term *Satyagraha* both in English and in Gujarati and abandoned the use of the term passive resistance.

Another term that posed such similar philosophical problems was the idea of *Swaraj*. In the Indian political and social discourse the term *Swaraj* was used to denote three overlapping notions. These notions were Home Rule, Independence and Freedom. It had been used in this sense before Gandhiji and even after Gandhiji came to dominate the Indian national movement. For Gandhiji *Swaraj* was none of these. Home Rule meant that Indians should rule in place of the British. Independence was used in the sense of political transfer of power while freedom implied freedom from slavery. For Gandhiji *Swaraj* was

a much wider notion. In his conception it had limited political scope. He defined Swaraj as; " It is Swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves."²³ To rule one's self meant to have control over the mind and passions, to lead a moral, duty bound life. Swaraj in this sense was a means of self-realisation. If Swaraj was so understood it was not an event or a fact. Independence and Home Rule were events. Freedom entailed a state of slavery. It was not political slavery that Gandhiji was perturbed by. In his conception Indian was being ground under not the British rule but the modern Western civilization. Those Indians who were not influenced by this civilization were free. He said; " The whole of India is not touched. Those alone who have been affected by western civilization have become enslaved."²⁴ The moment those who have become enslaved become free of the influence of the Western civilization India would become free. He faced this difficulty while translating the *Hind Swaraj* into English. He translated the title as *Indian Home Rule*. It was a poor substitute for Swaraj. In fact, in the book he had argued against the desire to have mere Home Rule. Gandhiji quickly abandoned the idea of Home Rule. Throughout the translation he stayed with the term Swaraj in English. The fact the independence, freedom and home rule were not Swaraj for him is also borne out by the fact that after India became independent in 1947 Gandhiji called upon the people of India to strive towards real Swaraj and advised that the Indian National Congress to strive for Swaraj.

It was not that Gandhiji had philosophical dilemmas translating Indian terms in English. He faced similar difficulties rendering into Gujarati certain key notions of the Western discourse. The following examples illustrate this point. In the *Hind Swaraj* Gandhiji had to convey four different notions. These were civilization, modern civilization, reform and progress. These were notions peculiar to his understanding of the Western civilization. Gandhiji found it extremely difficult to convey these notions in Gujarati. In the Gujarati original he used only one term to convey these separate ideas. The term that he used was *Sudhar* or *Sudharo*. The term Sudhar had two meanings in Gujarati. Sudhar means the good path. Sudharo was also used to denote a process of reform. In this usage also the idea of adopting the good or the right path were inherent. Despite this Gandhiji used the term Sudharo in all of the above senses. It is in the English translation that the specific sense in which the term Sudhar was used came to be illuminated.

Gandhiji had similar difficulty in rendering into English another concept that was central to his life and thought. This was the term *Ahimsa*. Ahimsa is the absence of Himsa, absence of violence and hence Ahimsa was

always rendered into English as non-violence. Ahimsa was for Gandhiji both a way of life and a means integral to his method of Satyagraha. He had no difficulty in translating Ahimsa as non-violence in the sense of a method. But Ahimsa as a way of life, as a philosophic notion that resonated with the teachings of all major religions of the world posed certain difficulties. Here Ahimsa could not be used in the narrow sense of non-killing. Ahimsa had to be a positive virtue and not a negative attribute. Gandhiji finally resolved the problem by resorting to the Christian term Love. He often translated Ahimsa as love. He used a different approach while dealing with another practice that was central to his life. This was the idea of *brahmacharya*. Brahmacharya has been translated as either celibacy or chastity. We know that celibacy and chastity are not exact equivalent terms. Gandhiji also rendered Brahmacharya in this limited sense of leading a celibate life. Gandhiji's own practice and thinking about brahmacharya went beyond the notion of celibacy, albeit he continued to emphasise the aspect of celibacy. He came to regard brahmacharya as a mode of knowing the self or realising the truth. As his own thought about brahmacharya became more nuanced Gandhiji began to find celibacy a very limited term. To resolve this difficulty Gandhiji went to the root of the term brahmacharya. Charya means conduct. Brahma means the ultimate reality or Truth. In its etymological sense brahmacharya is the conduct adopted in search of truth. Its philosophical implications were immense. Brahmacharya in the sense of celibacy meant only sexual control and abstinence, while at its root it meant conduct that leads to self-realization.

Thus, Gandhiji had a complex relationship with language and translation. Language had to convey the philosophical moorings of notions. If language in the act of translation failed to capture the true essence of thought Gandhiji was quick to modify and even abandon the exercise. In this sense Gandhiji was truly a bilingual thinker. Perhaps the best way to read him is to do so simultaneously in two languages.

NOTES

1. M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography Or The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Translated from the original Gujarati by Mahadev Desai (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Press, 1999 reprint), p. 57
2. M.K. Gandhi, *Satyagraha In South Africa*, Translated From The Gujarati by Valji Govindji Desai, (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 2003 reprint)
3. M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, p. ix
4. Ibid, pp. ix-x
5. Ibid, p. x
6. Ibid, pp. x-xi

7. M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj and other writings*, (ed.) Anthony Parel, (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 89
8. Ibid
9. Ibid
10. Gandhi, M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, p. 249
11. Ibid, p. 250
12. Ibid
13. CWMG, Vol. 8, p. 317, 'Sarvodaya-1'
14. Ibid, pp. 317-318
15. The first part of his translation of the *Defence of Socrates* appeared in the *Indian Opinion* of 4.4.1908, while the first part of Sarvodaya was published in the *Indian Opinion* of 16.5.1908.
16. CWMG, Vol. 8, p. 247, 'Story of a Soldier of Truth-1'
17. Ibid, p. 248
18. M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, p. 35
19. M.K. Gandhi, *Satyagraha In South Africa*, p. 103
20. Ibid, p. 105
21. Ibid, p. 107
22. Ibid
23. M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, p. 73
24. Ibid, p. 72