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Gandhi has been a world phenomenon the vastness and complexity of whose bewildering impact on the people of the different parts of the globe has not been fully and properly assessed to this day might possibly be regarded by some as a controversial fact but the fact that appearance of these phenomenon has resulted during all these years in the creation a certain totality of intriguing situation in our country and elsewhere demanding closer and closer understanding will perhaps be readily granted. It, therefore, seems necessary to us to interpret Gandhi by relating his theory to his activity. In his thesis on Feuerbach Karl Marx had also argued that the real task of social philosophers was to change the world rather than to interpret it. It is a task to which everyone subscribes Gandhi is no exception to it. In fact one can say that Gandhi is an outcome of his own reflection on the modes of his own activity undertaken chiefly to change the society of which he was a part.

Gandhi was a very complex thinker in the sense that elements of his thought are not separable but can just be distinguished for the purpose of analysis. Gandhian concepts are not absolute but relative. He himself kept on modifying, elaborating and enriching his own concepts on the basis of his experience. Actually Gandhi was a realist thinker but with a touch of idealism and mysticism in him on one side he was his own eschatological conception of salvation of human soul, he is, on the other hand no less empathic in his urgent appeals for bettering the economic and social conditions of people.

The Mahatma was of the opinion that the transformation of humanity cannot be attained in social and political vacuum. Whichever way power is looked at either as the ability of the ruling elite to induce changes from top or of the people to exert pressure from the bottom, it is an integral part of the process of social reconstruction. Further this problem must come to the terms with the question of distribution and the nature of property in the political system. No transformation from the existing economic systems to any other systems is possible without changing the property relations or the uses to which property is put, it is therefore inconceivable to imagine the transformation outside the context of this related phenomenon.

His critics have not been slow in pointing out that he left no blueprint behind for the future of his own people. Although, the transfer of state control from the colonial power to indigenous hands rightly appears to be the climax of decades of effort on a national scale, it is no less clear that in Gandhi's mind this was but a stepping stone to a social revolution, non-violent in kind, which he thought was yet to be made and which, in retrospect, was not ever made. He was not interested only in replacing the white rulers with the coloured ones.

The milling crowd that witnessed the hoisting of the tricolour on the 15 August 1947 and millions in all parts of the country, who were part of such exciting scenes elsewhere,

did not aspire for the stars. they did not ask for milk and honey flowing through India after the British left. But they had not bargained for what they are living through today with layers and layers of corruption, poverty, unemployment, exploitation around. They did expect their country would be better- freer, cleaner and more descent place for them and their progeny to live in.

On that faithful day India had the immortal hour of her tryst with destiny. On that day all great national leaders of India were in New Delhi. But the greatest of them all, Mahatma Gandhi was not there. The bugles were sounded and the trumpets were blown, but he was not there to take the salute. A thousand cameras clicked and the limelight beat fiercely on the political stage, but he was not there to take the bow. At that time, he was working among the poor of Bengal.

The reason for his absence was simple: he had two dreams in his life. His first dream was fulfilled but the second was not; and according to the Mahatma that true time for celebration would be when the second dream was fulfilled. His first he was liberation of India from British rule. The second dream was liberation of Indians from oppression and injustice, from inequity and inequality, from discord and disharmony. To quote his own words:

“I shall work for an India in which the poorest shall feel that it is their country in whose making they have an effective voice, an India in which there shall be no rich class no poor class of people, an India in which all communities shall lie in perfect harmony. there can be no room in such India for curse of untouchability or the curse of the intoxicating drink and drugs. Women will enjoy the same rights as man. Since we shall be at peace with all the rest of the world, neither exploiting nor being exploited. We should have the smallest army imaginable. All interest not in conflict with interest of dumb millions will be scrupulously respected, whether foreign or indigenous. Personally, I hate the distinction between foreign and indigenous. This is the India of my dream I shall be satisfied with nothing else”.

To introduce the subject in this way invites reflection on the concept of a “new society” and also invites reflection on the difference of situation in the country what I shall do is to set out the considerations which suggest themselves in my view, taking them briefly one by one. First of all there is the question of the distinction between state and society. There is an inbuilt irony in Gandhi's labours as a nationalist leader given that he had no high opinion of statehood and saw it as inherently based on violence, possessing as it does both power and authority. It is one thing to affect a transfer of power and quite another to effect social change. No doubt such a transfer plus the impact made by constitution making produces a certain momentum and most surely, a level of expectation that has an effect on society. But when Gandhi spoke of “the inert India masses” and “the scramble for power” among those he always referred to as classes he did so advisedly.

Subsequent years have moreover shown up the difference between official espousal of secular statehood, and the non- secular temperament of social at large. It is almost as if Gandhi were vindicated in his belief that matters at state level, including the whole fabric of new legislative measures, were necessary still at many removes from the groundswell of events and attitude and the level of society. Secularity apart, one could take another example of the gap between avowed State policy and social reality; But the fact squeaks in diverse

ways. The data note only show up gulfs between policy and social reality, but a commonality which trends to be slurred over by those lobbying from markedly deprived section.

The next consideration concerns the connotation and, even more so, the halo of meanings, that surrounds the word samaj in Indian usage. These meanings range from the micro-level connotation of specific community to wider ranges of allegiance extended up to national level. Such an extension of reference moreover opens up the questions of nationhood, Opinions range between a near Tagorean identification of samaj at micro level as both the de-facto and the appropriate focus of allegiance and those for whom, a discourse of nationhood, even if derivative, can sit comfortably upon such primary, indeed primal, diversities.

While Gandhi was acutely aware of the ills of his society, and was wise enough not to attribute them all to the colonial situation, his conception of a new society 'Still owed much to what he understood to be the better features of Indian society. Because what he offers remains a transformed rural model, but one in which feudal factors and likewise the self seeking activities of what he called 'the classes' would be replaced by a more egalitarian structure. In Indian meeting that gradually to shape gave pride of place to problems of the day to day running of the community and discussion of how difficulties could be tackled- all this after the more ritual elements of hymn singing and readings had been attended to. This was fully congruent with his policy of stressing the ethical element in religion, underplaying the elements which so often, in Indian conditions, proved provocative and divisive.

One might debate the extent to which Phoenix Settlement and Tolstoy Farm and then the Gandhian ashrams in India should at all be classified with Utopian communities at other times and places. The reason is this. While in retrospect we might be able to discern in these ashrams indications of the sort of society that Gandhi regarded as good, e.g., one which contained people of different faiths, where economy was practiced, and where all work at different tasks but also undertook specially manual work, there is something else that must be not forgotten. In each case the community was started for a specific purpose, to serve the Satyagraha needs at a particular juncture in time, whether this be, for example, the housing of Satyagraha families, the running of a newspaper for publicity purpose or the provision of a headquarters for running a particular campaign. To this extent they were founded for pragmatic considerations and not to embody a blueprint thought out by a Utopian thinker. Moreover, he believed that an institution should be closed down once it had served its purpose. Since the charge of utopianism has been a major one leveled against Gandhi, we may look at this a little more closely.

The question is complicated in virtue of a duality of issue, namely the question of what could be regarded as Utopian in the Indian context and what could be regarded as Utopian per se. This reminds us once more our bifocal task - understanding Gandhi in his own Indian context and extrapolating from this to a putative universal message.

The letter is what his admirers including probably ourselves, have at least in part been doing for several decades. But another reminder also becomes pertinent. What at one period of time may seem Utopian at another may acquire topos and become instantiated in reality. Who in the eighteenth century, for example, could have foreseen that philanthropy, the most individually inspired outcome of benevolent disposition, would also at least partly

show itself (however mixed actual cases might be) in the public domain? In short, the question what can be regarded as Utopian or otherwise is a historical question and not to be detached from context.

His general nonviolent stance apart, the features of Gandhi's thinking that had appeared to be Utopian to his critics include the following: his advocacy of bread labour both as economic conditions this included the transformation of the particular mode of stratification called caste and the raising of the standard of living of the most "depressed". The leverage behind his thinking here lay in his conviction that the modern bureaucratic state would not in fact do much to benefit the teeming millions of India. He was unable to anticipate the effects of the politicization of caste within the mobilization which is part and parcel of democratic procedures, nor did he anticipate how demographic pressures would gnaw into any agricultural surpluses attained. That the communal virus would require constant vigilance and that regional allegiances might threaten commitment to the good of all were, however, matters about which he had no illusions

It seems that there are two major sources for ascertaining Gandhi's conception of a new society- his actual conduct of the affairs with which he was connected in a pivotal fashion both in South Africa and India, and secondly the corpus of ideas to be gleaned from his writings and speeches. Since he believed that resistance to authority when abused should be accompanied *pari passu* by the construction of innovative in,-situations to take the place of the old, the seeds of his conception of a new society must be detected in the network of institutions with which he was associated. There is no particular mystique about this. The indications are not hard to find. We find them most of all in the development of the his conception of constructive work as something to be carried on along with the task of resisting the abuse of authority, whether this be the authority of a foreign government or an unjust structure in one's own society. The key to the new society in other words lies in the voluntary sector.

While constructive work in its more usual Gandhian connotation probably dates from Champaran days it would be wrong to leave out the South Africa period. His experiments into truth the phoenix and in Tolstoy Farm can be seen as a new working out of an old institution, that of the ashram. However, instead of being places of meditation and retreat they were hives of activity, providing shelter for the satyagraha families, educational experiments, and above all serving as the focus of an attempt by very different sorts of people to live, together in community. As in the Kibbutzim of Israel, life in such communities demanded constant vigilance in the daily working out of how ideals could be translated into practice in very intransigent conditions.

The experimental aspects of Gandhi's search for a more just social order throws into focus is several of his ideas about a future news society, women were not typecast into traditional rules in Tolstoy Farm and the school curriculum was both practical and elastic. The type of prayer policy and a means of ironing out social distinctions based on the golf between manual and non--manual occupations; his innovative idea for the gradual elimination of inheritance through the accrual of inherited surpluses to the state; and his theory of trusteeship as a way of taming capitalism.

Apart from these specific measures advocated, Utopian also, it has been thought, was the idea that satisfaction of the minimum needs of all could ever be accepted by the majority as the fundamental target of public policy. A society driven by interests is an acquisitive one and no amount of exhortation can make it otherwise. And yet Gandhi did on occasion and usually when appeal to principle was falling on stony ground during sessions of the all- India Congress, mention pragmatic and prudential considerations.

The at-first-sight Utopian measure can move into focus from high moral territory into the field of prudence, raising fewer hackles and becoming in fact feasible.

The next point, which needs consideration if we are to analyze Gandhi's conception of a new society. is the whole question of civil society and Gandhi's attitude to it. On one side the detailed analysis of what that term means other than to see it in the focus of institutional and ideological heterogeneity-which provides and invaluable counterweight is strange indeed for his distrust of centralized state power is writ large in all he has left for our enlightenment from Hind Swaraj onwards. There must then be other features of his thinking that have encouraged the view that he was no supporter of civil society. The following came to mind: his awareness of the interconnection between religion and politics in the Indian context, his advocacy of the moralizing of politics, and his belief in the intimate connection between the social, economic and political.

A closer look however surely shows that it was precisely within society that he thought the means could be found for resisting authority, especially state authority, when it was abused- namely in individual confidence of their non violent strength. That he was by no means an uncritical admirer of agrarian communitarians of a feudal kind becomes explicit in the oceanic circle model. At the centre of the concentric circles is the individual, not a traditional moksha--seeking individual, but one connected through ever-widening allegiance to communities of various kinds, including the nation and the wider community beyond it. His encouragement of ad hoc collectivities in particular Satyagraha campaign shows his recognition of the need for non-traditional alliances, i.e. beyond the boundaries of caste and creed. That such ad hoc collectivities should be capable of moral agency though their acts of nonviolent resistance is a less commonly recognized features of his conception of collectively will. That civil society has to be vindicated afresh in every culturally heterogeneous community is something which Gandhi was well situated to understand. That this often involved the putting on one side of religious affiliations was also something he had learnt from the conducting of particular campaign. That cultural heterogeneity produced strains and stressed that needed tackling at societal rather than state level was known less well - known to him. What could be debated is the extent to which a traditional society trying to modernize itself in an uneven manner can make much headway in fostering the kind of intermediate voluntary institutions that Rousseau and his successors had in mind as a desideratum in a democracy.

Civil society in Indian conditions has to take in the extension of kinship and caste affiliations into party structure regional foci of power centre/state tensions and many other factors not usually taken into account by those who theorize about civil society with a particular model of it in mind. Swaraj or self-rule conceived largely in terms of rural reconstruction, was target Gandhi thought to be especially appropriate in Indian conditions. Local needs must always be borne in mind.

The matters under the heading of civil society also bring in the much-discussed distinction between private and public domains. The principal of non-interference in the private domain is double-edged, for although the protection of individual rights seems and indisputable desideratum the domain of the private can mask violence and cruelty, particularly in the domestic realm. Did Gandhi's belief in the indissoluble link between morals and politics virtually erode the concept of private domain or did it not? Would the public character of ashram life illustrate a certain loss of the private or on the contrary illustrate how private virtues traditionally associated with family life could be extend beyond that boundary? Had he looked ahead, in particular, to the many sided impact that the entry of women into public life would have on society?

Another sphere in which the private/ public question arises is that of religion. The privatizing of religion may suggest itself as a desirable way of circumventing the divisive aspects of religion in pluralist context. But this does not seem to be what Gandhi advocated. He thought that the ethical content of religion and the element of aspiration towards a better life which it fostered could provide a valuable motive power in the public domain. To privatize religion would amount in indulgence in spiritual luxury, but even more seriously, it would deprive the activist from access to a rich vein of motive power in those he or she was seeking to mobilize for the public good. To try to activate the ethical element in religion was no doubt a brave way to guard against the regressive, aspects of the religious impulse. But it is hard to involve factors selectively in what is after all a cluster a package. the chances are that what is unleashed will contain much that is provocative to others. We face here once more an example of irony, when the eruption of particularist public sentiment, that is of a group, serves to undermine public good

Gandhi had in mind the target of - a new society for India, for he always insisted that each country must needs think out for itself what kind of future it envisaged. And here we are brought up short for in what sense can society be regarded as a matter of option? Both society and culture are surely givens. But this does not preclude a kind of social engineering set in motion precisely by the change taking place within society itself. There is much that startles once we think hard about Gandhi's ideas about a future society. Pluralist as he was, he thought ill of the pressures towards homogeneity that he believed were set in motion by industrialization. In this connection he probably underrated the extent to which industrialization in the long run could serve to weaken caste affiliations.

If one casts about for the main resource he highlights throughout his theory and practice it cannot be other than the compelling principle of nonviolence This is the resources that takes the place, theoretically speaking, of a cross-cultural notion of rationally. But to say this much is to underline the way in which Gandhi saw the salvation of society as lying within society itself and not in the hands of the state. Gandhi as an enlightened anarchist never ceased to see the state as an instrument of violence. It is the total syllabus of ideas that makes so much of what he has to say seem very out of tune with a great deal of contemporary thinking. From a Gandhian perspective a market economy, the sale of armaments in order to boost the economy—and these are only a few examples—all work against just society. What then should we do? There is no simple answer to such a question. The content of Swaraj has to be worked out by each country for itself. He spoke prophetically when on more than one occasion he expressed the view that his ideas would fall on more fertile territory outside India than in it.

The difficulties cannot be underestimated. Gandhi's sights were set on a non-hierarchical society and there has never yet been a society which did not contain some mode of stratification. He envisaged from of society in which otherness would be genuinely welcomed.

When thought through this hardly goes along with the concept of a mainstream which inspires most societies especially at the national level. It would involve a degree of decentralization perhaps incompatible with large nation states. In this connection Gandhi was always skilled in spotting sources of tension at the micro level for it was at this level for it was at this level that the task of creating a common space was carried on from day-to-day. He was after all an educator. Swaraj had to be built up within the individual and within small collective units for it was only there that initiative could be fostered and results monitored. His criteria of the health of a society Still remain challenging . \_Here they are: the condition of the most disadvantages in the land and the ability of the people to resist authority when it is abused. His thinking on violence nonviolence shows itself in both criteria. The disadvantaged are those against whom violence is being done- the structural violence endemic in unjust societies. In a healthy society it would be possible for the people to set right non - violence any abuse of power by those- elected. In whichever society may be we clearly have a long way to go.

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