I.II

Leaders
Gandhi’s India

Gandhi and Indian identity

We have chosen to write about ‘Gandhi and Indian identity’ rather than the conventional topic ‘Gandhi as nationalist’ because, as Ashis Nandy has argued, Gandhi (like Tagore) was an anti-nationalist. Partha Chatterjee, too, argues that ‘Gandhi does not think within the category, “nationalism”’ (Chatterjee 1993: 91). If India was not a nation in the usual sense, what manner of country was it? Nandy puts it this way:

Gandhi was always keen to define his nationalism as part of his universal struggle for justice and equality and he made it clear in so many words that the other name for armed nationalism was imperialism and he considered it a curse.

(Nandy 2010: 244–45)

Gandhi opposed assuming the kind of exclusive identity for which ‘integral’ nationalism (Hayes 1931) called and which was manifest in its extreme form in twentieth-century Europe with Hitler’s rise to power in Germany. The nation tended to subsume, even obliterate, all other identities and to treat ‘the other’ at home or abroad at best as lesser beings, at worst as less than human.

The question whether Gandhi did or did not speed Britain’s exit from India provides a distraction. Although Gandhi no doubt contributed to Britain’s exit from India, it can be argued plausibly that Britain would have departed from the subcontinent after World War II whether or not Gandhi occupied the historical stage. What may prove to be his most important contribution is what he did for Indian character, capacities and political culture. Gandhi’s leadership, regardless of its objective success or failure, had important subjective consequences, repairing wounds in self-esteem inflicted by generations of imperial subjection, restoring courage and potency, helping India to acquire national coherence, recruiting and mobilizing new constituencies for the cause of Independence.
As the psychological and moral effects of Britain’s conquest and subjection of India spread and deepened, Britons convinced an increasing number of Indians that passivity, weakness and cowardice were the norms of Indian culture and character. These beliefs led many Britons to think that the superiority of British power and culture was an inherent rather than an historical phenomenon. Indians, too, came to believe that they lacked courage and moral worth.\(^1\) The young Jawaharlal Nehru who became independent India’s first prime minister, and who often questioned the Mahatma’s political strategy and tactics, concedes again and again his effect on the nationalist generation.

Much that he said we only partially accepted or sometimes did not accept at all. But all this was secondary. The essence of his teaching was fearlessness and truth and action allied to these … So, suddenly, as it were, that black pall of fear was lifted from the people’s shoulders, not wholly, of course, but to an amazing degree … It was a psychological change, almost as if an expert in psychoanalytic method had probed deep into the patient’s past, … and thus rid him of that burden.

\(^{\text{Nehru 1958: 361–62}}\)

Gandhi also shaped Indian identity by transforming India’s political culture. Soon after returning to India in January 1915 after 21 years in South Africa he began to intervene in a battle that began in 1905–06 between moderates personified by Gopal Krishna Gokhale and extremists by Bal Gangadhar Tilak. Gokhale argued that swaraj or self-government within the empire could be achieved by gradual and incremental constitutional reform. The extremists led by Tilak stood for swaraj defined as complete sovereignty achieved through constitutional means if possible but if necessary through collective direct action that could result in violence.

Gandhi followed Tilak in calling for direct action in the form of civil disobedience, non-cooperation and satyagraha, but made direct action compatible with Gokhale’s constitutional methods by making non-violent means an essential aspect of direct action. Gandhi created an effective alternative to Gokhale’s ultimately ineffective constitutionalism and Tilak’s ultimately violent extremism. Reshaping Indian political culture by making right means an essential requirement contributed after Independence to the viability of constitutional democracy in India.

Gandhi’s successful insistence on right means, and that means determined ends, became a central component of India’s political culture in the 1920s and 1930s, decades that witnessed the rise of fascist and communist ideologies and regimes that radically subordinated means to ends. For Gandhi the opposite was true:

For me it is enough to know the means. Means and ends are convertible terms …  
\(^{\text{Gandhi 1946: 424}}\)

We have always control over the means but not over the end [so that] our progress towards the goal will be in exact proportion to the purity of our means.

\(^{\text{Tendulkar 1962: 366}}\)

Another way Gandhi shaped Indian identity was by putting the village and the villager at the center of India’s political imagination and strategy. Again Ashis Nandy:

Gandhi took India’s freedom movement to the village. He thought of the village as the basic unit of Indian civilization; and he envisioned the future of India around that of the village.

\(^{\text{Nandy 2010: 258}}\)\(^{\text{2}}\)
However, it wasn’t always that way. Like almost all the leaders of India’s freedom struggle Gandhi started out as a city boy. As he tells us in his autobiography, he was born in a city, Porbandar, where his father was prime minister of a small princely state. ‘For three generations, from my grandfather, [the Gandhis … ] have been Prime Ministers in several Kathiawad States’ (Gandhi 1957: 3). He was educated at an elite college, the Rajkumar College in the city of Rajkot where the children of rulers and those who served them were sent. He qualified for the bar at the Inns of Court in London, a city that served as the hub of the British empire. During his years in South Africa he lived and worked as a lawyer in cities, mainly Durban but also Johannesburg.

So how did Gandhi come to exemplify and speak for village India? Ashis Nandy speculates that there was a ‘retrievable imagination of the village … based on the rituals, folklore, epics, legends, and myths to which he was exposed … that … was waiting to be reclaimed.’ This latent village made manifest ‘became Indian public life’s first village’ (Nandy 2010: 260).

‘Creative Indians,’ Nandy argues, were responsive to Gandhi’s imagined village because they were prepared to invoke ‘the fantasy of the “archetypical”, “remembered”, but nevertheless living Indian village’ (Nandy 2010: 258). They were aided and abetted in their fantasy by the filmmaker Satyajit Ray, who created ‘Indian public life’s first village … in his debut film, Pather Panchali’ (Nandy 2010: 260); by the novelist R.K. Narayan, whose ‘Malgudi stories supply clues to the imagery of the village that empowers the creativity of Gandhi and Ray’ (Nandy 2010: 263); and by M.N. Srinivas whose The Remembered Village is the ‘first Indian village of the social sciences’ (Nandy 2010: 265).

Gandhi’s imagined village began to become manifest early in his years in South Africa. In 1904 he read Ruskin’s Unto This Last on an overnight train from Johannesburg to Durban. He resolved the next morning ‘to change my life in accordance with the ideals of this book’ (Gandhi 1957: 298). He did so by establishing an agricultural settlement on 100 acres 14 miles from Durban, Natal’s largest city and its principal port. Known as the Phoenix Settlement, it ‘marked an important stage in Gandhi’s progressive self-disentanglement from city life … ’ (Green 1993: 158).

In 1909 he wrote Hind Swaraj. In it, he critiques and rejects ‘modern civilization,’ the civilization spawned by the industrial revolution that created the modern city. He tells his readers in the Foreword that ‘the views I venture to place before the reader are, needless to say, held by many Indians not touched by what is known as civilization … ’ (Gandhi 1997: 10), i.e. those living in villages beyond the reach of the British Raj’s colonial modernity.

The catalyst for Gandhi’s imagined village in India was his political guru and mentor, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, who advised him soon after he returned to India in 1915 after 21 years in South Africa to get to know rural India better.

Nandy’s story about an imagined retrievable village doesn’t tell us why Gandhi should take India’s freedom movement to India’s villages. Could it be that Gandhi, a strategic as well as a moral political thinker, recognized that the village was where most people lived and that as a person committed to mobilizing and serving the community, he could and should address villagers’ poverty and exploitation? However, what about a proximate cause, a triggering mechanism, that would lead him to India’s villages?

Out of the blue at Congress’s December 1916 session in Lucknow Gandhi was approached by Rajkumar Shukla, a simple but intrepid agriculturalist of Bettiah near Champaran, located in the heart of Bihar’s indigo plantations, ‘far up north of the Ganges, and right at the foot of the Himalayas in close proximity to Nepal’ (Gandhi 1957: 411). Shukla pursued and badgered him until he agreed to travel to distant Bihar to investigate the condition of Indigo farmers. There he learned that at a time when the availability of commercially manufactured indigo had radically reduced the price of naturally grown indigo, tenants like Rajkumar Shukla were required by law to plant three out of every 20 parts of their land with unremunerative indigo.

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Gandhi along with a team of voluntary educated helpers (including the future president of India, Rajendra Prasad) spent almost two months (April and May 1917) in and around Champaran taking testimony from thousands of impoverished tenant cultivators, writing a report and conducting negotiations with government officials and leaders of the Planters Associations. The result was that ‘the tinkathia system … was abolished, and with it the planters’ raj came to an end’ (Gandhi 1957: 425).

More important than the successful result for Gandhi’s conception of village India was his initial reception in this remote region of the country, a reception which taught him that he could be effective in a village context and encouraged a belief that the village might be the site of an alternative to the modern city.

No emissaries had … been sent there … to prepare the ground for our arrival … No political work had yet been done amongst them. The world beyond Champaran was not known to them. And yet they received me as though we had been long lost friends. It is no exaggeration … to say that in this meeting with the peasants I was face to face with God, Ahimsa and Truth … That day in Champaran was an unforgettable event in my life …

(Gandhi 1957: 412)

Gandhi’s identification of India with its villages did not go uncontested. Prime Minister Nehru’s India was to be urban and industrial. Big dams were to be the temples of modern India. Indeed, several generations of civil servants, intellectuals and Congress politicians shared Nehru’s conception of a modern industrial and urban India.

In October and November 1945 Gandhi initiated an exchange of letters with Nehru to explore what kind of a future each of them envisioned for independent India. Would Nehru speak his language after he was gone? ‘If the difference [between us] is fundamental then I feel the public should also be made aware of it … I still stand by the system of Government envisaged in Hind Swaraj’ (Gandhi 1997: 149). The exchange that follows reveals Nehru’s incomprehension of and indifference to Hind Swaraj, Gandhi’s 1909 critique of modern civilization and his alternative to it.

Gandhi’s development goals start with the village and villager, with local swaraj and local employment using appropriate technology in small-scale industries, craft production and agriculture. Nehru’s development goals start with the city and urban life and with industrialization that will ‘occupy the commanding heights of the economy’ through centralized state planning and work in large-scale, impersonal factories and offices.

‘You will not understand me,’ Gandhi wrote, ‘if you think that I am talking about the villages of today. My villages … exist in my imagination.’ He alerted Nehru that his vision of a modern industrial India was an imagined one too: ‘After all, every person lives in the world of his own imagination’ (Gandhi 1997: 150).

The village of Gandhi’s imagination would be self-reliant, not self-sufficient.

I can think of many which will have to be produced on a large scale. Maybe there will be railroads, so also post and telegraph. What it will have and what it will not, I do not know, nor do I care. If I can maintain its essence, the rest will mean free facility to come and settle.

(Gandhi 1997: 150)

Gandhi’s imagined village was to be voluntary, another experiment with truth.
Nehru anticipated Bhirmrao Ramji Ambedkar’s denunciation of the village in the Constituent Assembly where Ambedkar asked, “What is the village but a sinkhole of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and communalism?”

Nehru replied to Gandhi:

I do not understand why a village should necessarily embody truth and non-violence. A village, normally speaking, is backward intellectually and culturally and no progress can be made from a backward environment. Narrow minded people are much more likely to be untruthful and violent.

(Gandhi 1997: 150)

Nehru then proceeded to attack what he believed to be the source of Gandhi’s village commitment, his critique of modern civilization in Hind Swaraj:

It is many years since I read Hind Swaraj … But even when I read it 20 years ago it seemed to me completely unreal … It is 38 years since Hind Swaraj was written. The world has completely changed since then … Consideration of these questions [of development goals] must keep present facts, forces and the human material we have today in view, otherwise it will be divorced from reality.

(Gandhi 1997: 152–53)

On November 12, 1945 Nehru found the time to meet with Gandhi to discuss what development should mean and be in independent India. The only account we have of this conversation is the memo Gandhi sent to Nehru summarizing what he took to be the gist of their discussion. After noting that ‘there is not much difference in our outlook,’ Gandhi listed what he took to be four areas of agreement. The third was that ‘the condition of the countryside and the city should … be similar in respect to food and water, habitation, clothing and recreation …,’ and the fourth that ‘the basic unit must be an imaginary [self-reliant] village’ (Gandhi 1997: 155).

Nehru did not respond but his silence speaks for itself. Gandhi for his part didn’t press for more meetings.

Nehru’s and Gandhi’s mutual silence on the eve of Independence with respect to the standing and place of the village in India’s future marks a watershed. On one side lies Gandhi’s, Satyajit Ray’s, R.K. Narayan’s and M.N. Srinivas’s village, on the other Nehru’s and Ambedkar’s: the imagined village as utopia and the imagined village as dystopia.

Today, a century after Hind Swaraj, half a century after Independence, the imagined village, utopic, dystopic or statistical artifact, continues to mark India’s identity.

**Clothing matters**

Gandhi also shaped Indian political identity through political theatre. He learned early on that clothing mattered. Clothing communicated a message about himself and about his relationship to others. Soon after his arrival in London in late October 1888 to study law at the Inns of Court he tells us that he attempted to ‘play the English gentleman.’ His use of the phrase gives us a clue to the self-consciousness with which he was to treat his future presentations of self. Was he ‘putting us on,’ engaging in political theatre, occasionally even ‘ceremonial profanation’ (Goffman 1959) in his efforts to harmonize his inner self and outer persona? In order to play the English gentleman he took violin, elocution and dancing lessons and spent a lot of time in front of a mirror trying to ‘part his hair in the correct fashion’ (Gandhi 1957: 50–51).
I went in for a chimney-pot hat costing nineteen shillings—an excessive price in those days ... I wasted ten pounds on an evening suit made in Bond Street, the center of fashionable life in London ... This infatuation must have lasted about three months.

(Gandhi 1957: 50)

If Gandhi abandoned the project of ‘playing the English gentleman,’ he did not abandon using clothing to send a message about who and what he was. His aborted effort in London to dress like an English gentleman was resumed in South Africa (1893–1914), where he wore fashionably tailored three-piece suits with striped tie and starched white collar appropriate to an Anglicized £5,000-a-year barrister (Fischer 1950: 74). When he returned to India after 21 years in South Africa at the invitation of his ‘political guru,’ Gopal Krishna Gokhale, with a possibility that he might become a leader of the Indian National Congress, he was ready to provoke the Anglicized reception committee in Bombay. He clothed himself and his entire family in Kathiawar village costume and pointedly spoke in Gujarati rather than English (Green 1993: 251; Tarlo 1996: 69).

Gandhi’s change of dress became increasingly radical, culminating in a loin cloth which he first used in September 1921 in connection with the deadline set by Congress for the achievement of swaraj. The loin cloth was highly controversial even among his friends and admirers. Gandhi realized it could be misinterpreted and was aware that some would regard it as indecent or primitive (Tarlo 1996: 72). Notoriously, Gandhi’s lifelong adversary, Winston Churchill, did so in 1930 after the Salt satyagraha when he remarked that:

> it is alarming and nauseating to see Mr. Gandhi, a seditious middle temple lawyer, now posing as a fakir of a type well known in the east, striding half-naked, up the steps of the vice-regal palace …

(Tendulkar 1962: III, 53)

Emma Tarlo saw it differently:

> while the loin cloth was indeed a full scale promotion of Indianness, it was not a glorification of poverty. Rather, through his nakedness, Gandhi hoped visually to expose Indian poverty while simultaneously suggesting its resolution through hand-spinning, weaving, and freedom from British rule.

(Tarlo 1996: 75)

By 1931, while in London for the second round table conference on Indian constitutional reform, Gandhi could sum up the meaning of the loin cloth: ‘I am here on a special mission and my loin cloth ... is the dress of my principals, the people of India’ (Gandhi 1929–30: 79–80). Gandhi’s clothes were a sartorial expression of his inner mental evolution from barrister to mahatma. As Millie Polak, who had spent some years with him in South Africa, commented: ‘What different phases in Gandhi’s mental career had been proclaimed by the clothes he wore! Each costume, I think, denoted an attitude of mind’ (Polak 1950: 142). Susan Bean goes further:

> He used his appearance to communicate his most important messages in a form comprehensible to all Indians. Engaged in the simple labor of spinning, dressed as one of the poor in a loin cloth and chadar, this important and powerful man communicated the dignity of poverty, the dignity of labor, the equality of all Indians, the greatness of Indian civilization, as well as his own saintliness. The communicative
power of costume transcended the limitations of language in multilingual and illiterate India.

(Bean 1989: 368)

However, the power of clothing in shaping India’s identity was not limited to what Gandhi wore. It extended to what he induced others to make and to wear. Emblematic of Gandhi’s influence on national dress was the decision by the highly Anglicized Motilal Nehru to shed, at Gandhi’s behest, his Savile Row suits for homespun khadi and a Gandhi cap (Tharoor 2003). Motilal Nehru was one of the wealthiest men in India, a leader of the bar and, in the mid-1920s, of the liberal Swaraj party, and father of Jawaharlal, whom he had sent to Harrow. Father and son, like thousands of their rank and station, signaled their support of Gandhi’s ideas and practices by adopting khadi dress and khadi making.

For Gandhi the making, marketing and wearing of khadi symbolized the possibility of self-reliant village industries based on craft production and appropriate technology. However, it had other meanings. Khadi became a sort of uniform, publicly marking a person’s politics. It was a leveling force, rubbing out the visual markers of status. Congressmen were required to wear as well as make khadi, which became a marker of common national identity and purpose (Trivedi 2007).

A country of many languages

Gandhi shaped Indian identity not only by having the Anglicized nationalist elite wear peasant clothing but also by having the English-speaking elite that dominated the Indian National Congress (INC) recognize and adopt the vernacular languages of India’s regions as its medium of communication. Doing so began a process that in time institutionalized a multilingual India of linguistic states that share sovereignty in a federal system.

In December 1920, when Gandhi took charge of Congress affairs at its Nagpur session, he re-wrote its constitution in ways that transformed it from an elite, unmanageable English-speaking organization into an effectively functioning popular one that communicated in regional languages. The pre-1920 Provincial Congress Committees (PCCs) could not accommodate the popular membership base Gandhi sought to create because their boundaries, which coincided with the administrative boundaries of British India, cut across those of language. The consequence was that English literacy was virtually required for participation in Congress affairs.

‘In so far as Congress is concerned,’ Gandhi held, ‘we should re-divide India into provinces on a linguistic basis’ (Gandhi 1919: 289). Gandhi proceeded to do so by creating 21 Provincial Congress Committees, each corresponding to a linguistic region of India. The new PCCs succeeded, although not as well as Gandhi expected they would, in transforming Congress from an elite to a popular organization, and in laying the basis for the multilingual India (Gandhi 1920–21: vol. XIX, 191).

Gandhi had begun his effort to break the hegemony of English in the Congress in January 1915 when he spoke Gujarati rather than English at his arrival in Bombay from South Africa. Throughout his career in India he continued to promote multilingualism in his writing, publishing and speaking. He addressed the question of a common language for India by favoring the more inclusive Hindustani, understood as a combination of Urdu and Hindi written in a Devanagari script, over the more exclusive Hindi, the language that won out in the constitution by a narrow one-vote margin (Sarangi: 2010; Austin 1999). After Independence, state reorganization in the 1960s created a federal system in which linguistic states shared sovereignty with the Delhi-based central government.
Equal respect for all religions: Gandhi’s secularism

Another way Gandhi shaped Indian identity was by making it possible for religion to contribute positively to public life and by insuring that religious diversity could flourish. He began by respecting Hinduism because it tolerated diverse faiths, but learned from Vivekananda to go beyond the toleration of diverse faiths to their acceptance. In 1930 he shifted from the discourse of toleration to one that spoke of ‘equal respect for religions’ (Chatterjee 2005: 33), but Gandhi and those he influenced went beyond toleration and respect for all religions to finding truths in all religions and learning from them.

What did Gandhi mean by religion? Unlike most philosophers, he rejected the separation of ethics and religion. For him, dharma included ethics and religion (Chatterjee 2005: 12). The essence of religion, he tells us in Hind Swaraj (Gandhi 1997: 67) and in the introduction to his autobiography (Gandhi 1957: xxvii), is morality. Religion understood as ethics or morality helped to answer the Tolstoy questions that preoccupied Gandhi: ‘What shall we do and how shall we live?’ 12 Gandhi’s answer was to be absorbed in the service of the community:

The reason behind it was my desire for self-realization. I had made the religion of service my own, as I felt that God could be realized only through service …

(Gandhi 1957: 159)

What I want to achieve [through service], is … to see God face to face, to attain Moksha.

(Gandhi 1957: xxvi)

For Gandhi the divine was immanent and personal; he was ‘overwhelmed’ by Tolstoy’s The Kingdom of God is Within You (Gandhi 1957: 137).

Gandhi’s view of religion did not go uncontested during the nationalist era, an era that did so much to reshape and define India’s identity. His principal opponents were his designated heir and successor, Jawaharlal Nehru, whose secularism had no place for religion, and Hindu and Muslim communalists who made Hindu and Muslim the only markers that mattered for identity and collective action.

Nehru, an enlightenment rationalist who had taken science tripos at Cambridge, placed his faith in scientific truth and foresaw a time when religion would be discredited as a form of knowledge and fade from view.13 After his death, a call to the country by his close followers to reject religious communalism and to adopt a ‘scientific temper’ fell largely on deaf ears (Wang 2001: 170–74; Haksar et al. 1981; Gregorious 1981).

The struggle over religion between Nehru and Gandhi turned in part on their respective views of secularism. Gandhi was a pluralist not only with respect to religion but more generally. He rejected communalist identity politics not least with respect to religion that reduced a person or a group to a singular belief or characteristic (Chatterjee 2005: 12). Gandhi’s secularism rested on his conviction that all religions convey truth, that they give meaning to moral life, and that Indian society can be built on a community of religious communities. Nehru, his political heir and successor, held a different view of secularism, one that denied the validity of religious knowledge and saw it as an impediment to the realization of a modern India.14

During the nationalist era the principal voices of religious exclusivism were the Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League, communal parties that resisted or opposed sharing the state power or social space with a religious other. Under the leadership of Madan Mohan Malviya the Mahasabha’s goal became ‘the maintenance, protection and promotion of the Hindu race, Hindu culture and Hindu civilization for the advancement of Hindu Rashtra [nation]’ (Mansingh
1998: 173–74). Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the architect with Bal Gangadhar Tilak of the Lucknow Pact in 1916 that united the Congress and the Muslim League in the nationalist effort to rid the country of British rule, in the end gave up on his effort to have Congress share sovereignty with India’s Muslim minority by opting for a Muslim Pakistan (Rudolph 2006).

Gandhi had made Hindu–Muslim unity an essential goal of his quest for an independent India. Many interpreters of Gandhi’s life and career, and not least Gandhi himself, count the partition of India into a Muslim Pakistan and secular but Hindu-majority India as marking the failure of Gandhi’s religious inclusivism and pluralism. The latest such interpreter of Gandhi’s life, Joseph Lelyveld, echoed others when he said that the communal mayhem, murder, and migrations of partition brought Gandhi’s ‘whole life into question’ (Lelyveld 2011: 293).

However, Gandhi’s view of religion, that it was a source of morality and as such constitutive of social life and of standards in politics (Madan 1987: 752), survived the fires of partition. His view of secularism, which called for the state to give equal respect and equal rights to all religions, found constitutional expression in Article 25, guaranteeing all persons ‘the right to profess, practice and propagate religion,’ and Article 26, guaranteeing ‘… every religious denomination … the right … to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes [and … ] to manage its own affairs in matters of religion … ’ (Basu 1999: 224).

Despite the use after Independence of religion for communal purposes by Hindu nationalists, Gandhi’s legacy continues to mark India as a country the soft power of which includes the influence of religion on public life.

The world’s Gandhi: Gandhi as world historical figure

The other West

The 1909 Foreword and the 1910 Preface of Hind Swaraj (Indian Home Rule) make clear that Gandhi was involved in a larger movement of European thought that questioned and resisted violent imperialism and dehumanizing industrialism. In its time and subsequently that movement has proved to have global reach. It is the European doubters and dissenters who motivated and helped Gandhi formulate his critique of modern civilization and articulate an alternative to it.

Gandhi thought of European dissenters as the ‘other’ West. It was a West that shaped his civilizational hybridity and countercultural mentality. It was a West to which, in time, he made major contributions. The ‘other’ West was defined in part by the 14 authors and 20 books Gandhi listed in an appendix to Hind Swaraj and in part by public figures of the 1880s and 1890s who influenced him, such as William Morris, George Bernard Shaw, Annie Besant, John Burns, Maurice Hyndman, Edward Carpenter and Henry Salt. The authors and public figures imagined another way to live and marched to a different drummer. Gandhi’s co-conspirators said no to modernity’s siren call of progressivism and maximalism, and to empire’s awesome violence and splendor. In the Preface and Foreword to Hind Swaraj Gandhi tells us what he learned from and shared with the other West:

Whilst the views expressed in Hind Swaraj are held by me, I have but endeavoured humbly to follow Tolstoy, Ruskin, Thoreau, Emerson and other writers besides the masters of Indian philosophy … For ready reference some of the books are mentioned in the Appendices.

(Gandhi 1997: 6)
In the Foreword he tells us:

These views are mine, and yet not mine. They are mine because I hope to act according to them. They are also part of my being. But yet, they are not mine, because I lay no claim to originality. They have been formed after reading several books. That which I dimly felt received support from these books.

(Gandhi 1997: 10)

Gandhi argues that colonialism and imperialism and the modern civilization they imposed on the West as well as India did not eliminate the possibility of a Ruskin or a Tolstoy speaking from within the West for an ‘other’ West. For Gandhi in 1909, countercultural dissent and resistance to the hegemony of modern civilization were already global phenomena.

**Gandhi and the making of an other West**

Gandhi began to contribute to the ‘other’ West soon after World War I, when his significance reached well beyond the Indian subcontinent. He first appeared on the world stage in 1919 in the immediate aftermath of the war. The war had dealt a devastating blow to the promise of technological and moral progress in the Western world. European and American consciousness was radically transformed. The fervid patriotism and lofty idealism that led millions to offer their lives for their country disappeared from view. For a time, war was discredited as a test of national greatness and as an instrument of policy. In the new anti-war climate, pacifism achieved a greater measure of credibility and public standing, a circumstance that helped to open the way to Gandhi’s ideas and practice.

In Europe, Romain Rolland, who in 1915 had won the Nobel Prize for literature, took a critical attitude toward the great butchery of 1914–18. Rolland in his widely translated 1923 biography, *Mahatma Gandhi* ([Rolland 1924], linked Europe’s post-war tilt toward pacifism to Gandhi’s world view. Roland’s biography put Gandhi on Europe’s mental landscape.

In post-World War I America Gandhi attracted the attention of a leading liberal theologian, John Haynes Holmes, from 1919 until 1949 minister of the Community Church of New York and editor of the liberal, internationalist and pacifist journal, *Unity*. Holmes announced to much fanfare in April 1921 that he would deliver a sermon, ‘Who is the Greatest Man in the World?’ The answer he gave was M.K. Gandhi. Holmes found Gandhi credible as a ‘mahatma,’ which he translated to his attentive congregation not as ‘great soul’ but as ‘the Saint,’ a characterization which he made intelligible in Christian terms.19

Holmes’s rival for interpreting Gandhi to America was Reinhold Niebuhr, the eminent theologian who was among the most influential public intellectuals in the decades preceding and following World War II. Niebuhr, who was called ‘the father of us all’ by ‘realists’ (Fox 1985: 238), characterized Holmes as the ‘ultimate symbol of the sentimental liberal pacifist’ (Fox 1985: 130). However, Niebuhr, in his immensely influential and most important 1932 book, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, presented a Gandhi more in keeping with Holmes’s view:

The advantage of non-violence as a method of expressing goodwill lies in the fact that it protects the agent against the resentment which violent conflict always creates in both parties to a conflict, and that it proves this freedom of resentment and ill-will to the contending party in the dispute by enduring more suffering that it causes … One of the most important results of a spiritual discipline against resentment in a social dispute is that it leads to an effort to discriminate between the evils of a social system
and situation and the individuals who are involved in it. Mr. Gandhi never tires of making a distinction between individual Englishmen and the system of imperialism which they maintain … The discovery of elements of common human frailty in the foe and, concomitantly, the appreciation of all human life as possessing transcendent worth, creates attitudes which transcend social conflict and thus mitigate its cruelties. (Niebuhr 1953: 234, 247–49, 255–56)

Ultimately, Niebuhr tried to have it both ways: idealism and realism. Despite his fulminations against sentimental liberalism, he allowed himself to admire, even to identify with, Gandhi the prophet and statesman who could command a nation and humble an empire.

Gandhi also entered American consciousness as a successful opponent of British imperialism in India. His success in using non-violent, collective action in challenging the world’s mightiest empire in India intersected with political and ideological currents in the USA. Ironically, it was the proponents of American imperialism who were the arch enemies of British imperialism. The leading voice among them was press baron William Randolph Hearst. By 1922 Hearst had become an early advocate of Gandhi’s cause. Seizing the opportunity to twist the lion’s tail that Gandhi’s challenge to the British empire offered, he inveighed against ‘England and her domination of India against the will of its 300,000,000 people’ (Jha 1973: 124).

Colonel Robert R. McCormick, publisher of the Chicago Tribune, joined Hearst in publicizing Gandhi’s challenge to British rule in India. It suited both publishers’ anti-British imperialism goals to praise and support Gandhi. It was McCormick who sent William Shirer to India to report on Gandhi and Indian affairs for the Chicago Tribune. The sea change that occurred after World War I in the USA’s outlook toward war and imperialism helped make the dhoti-clad, bare-chested Gandhi the hero of pacifists whose opposition to the war now seemed justified. American opinion was ready to celebrate a nationalist leader who was Asian, non-violent, and ‘spiritual.’ By 1930, the year of the great Salt March that shook the foundations of British rule in India, Time magazine declared him ‘man of the year.’

Gandhi’s standing as a world historical figure grew after the success of the salt satyagraha in 1930 made the practice of non-violent resistance and non-violent civil disobedience credible possibilities for the conduct of politics. Among the major figures who learned from him and came to practice non-violent resistance were Martin Luther King in the USA, Lech Walesa and Vaclav Havel in Eastern Europe, and Nelson Mandela in South Africa.

Gandhi did not regard non-violent resistance as universally applicable. Quite the contrary, it could be used only under limited, special circumstances. Himsa or violence was ubiquitous, a condition of living, breathing and acting in the world. Ahimsa or non-violence was rarely achieved and difficult to sustain. Gandhi himself participated in four wars: the Boer War and the Zulu rebellion in South Africa where he organized and led medical corps; World War I where he recruited soldiers for the Indian Army in Gujarat to fight; and World War II where he was prepared to commit India to fight with Britain against Hitler if Britain would commit to India’s Independence when the war ended. He justified his participation in these wars after finding that there was no non-violent way to prevent or stop them and that he was obliged to support the government, the laws and protection on which he relied.

Martin Luther King’s use of non-violence in the American Civil Rights movement may have been non-violent resistance’s greatest success. As leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, King made Gandhi a household name in the USA by embracing his ideas and methods. Through King, Gandhi affected the conduct of the Civil Rights movement that began in the mid-1950s and crested in the mid-1960s. King discovered Gandhi early in his career, made Gandhi’s ideas and practice his own, and remained faithful to them when, in what
turned out to be the last years of his life, many of those whom he had previously influenced and led abandoned satyagraha and non-violence.

Prior to reading Gandhi I had about concluded that the ethics of Jesus were only effective in individual relationships ... Gandhi was probably the first person in history to lift the love ethic of Jesus above mere interaction between individuals to a powerful and effective social force on a large scale ... (King 1958: 47)

In the 1980s Gandhi began to influence European public life. He was acknowledged by the architects and heroes of the non-violent revolutions in Eastern Europe, Lech Walesa in Poland and Vaclav Havel in Czechoslovakia. Havel shared Gandhi’s sense of the value of situational truth that the practice of satyagraha could achieve. Such truth, Havel argued, enabled humans to recognize ‘an elementary sense of justice,’ ‘the ability to see things as others do,’ and ‘a sense of transcendental responsibility … ’ (Havel 1992), and made them recognize politics as ‘morality in practice’ (Havel 1995).

In the 1990s the Dalai Lama began to invoke Gandhi in his non-violent efforts to gain autonomy for Tibet (Gyatso 1990) and Nelson Mandela publicly acknowledged that ‘the Gandhian influence dominated freedom struggles on the African continent right up to the 1960s.’ Mandela tells us that:

I followed the Gandhian [non-violence] strategy ... because of the unity it forged among the apparently powerless ... for as long as I could ... [The African National Congress] chose sabotage [rather than retaliatory violence] because it did not involve the loss of life and offered the best hope for future race relations. (Mandela 1999: 74)

In 2011, Gandhian non-violent resistance was available again in the struggle for justice and equality in Cairo’s Tahrir Square, emblem of the Arab Spring that challenged and sometimes toppled authoritarian regimes. Non-violent resistance delegitimized the state’s violence even as it legitimized the protesters’ cause. Gandhi had shown another way to fight.21

Notes

1 We develop these historical themes in Rudolph and Rudolph 2006: chapter 5.
2 A decade earlier Nandy presented a more complicated story of the place of the village and of the city in the shaping of Indian identity: ‘The Journey to the Past as Journey into the Self: The Remembered Village and the Poisoned City’ in Nandy 2001: 1–41.
3 For more on R.K. Narayan, arguably the first Indian novelist writing in English to achieve worldwide literary standing, see Ram and Ram 1996.
5 This system was known as the tinkathia system, as three (tin) kathas out of 20 (which make one acre) had to be planted with indigo.
6 An untouchable himself, Ambedkar emerged in the nationalist era as a leader of the untouchable community when he challenged Gandhi’s efforts to represent and speak for the untouchable community. Nehru appointed him law minister in his first post-independence cabinet. As Chairman of the Drafting Committee in the Constituent Assembly he played a leading role in shaping the 1950 Constitution. beyondcapital.wordpress.com/2011/01/1marx-ambedkar-villages/ Marx, Ambedkar and Indian Villages (accessed August 18, 2011).
7 For an examination of the debate including why both protagonists lapsed into silence see Rudolph 2006: 23–27.
8 The term is of course the title of Emma Tarlo’s wonderful book (Tarlo 1996).

9 Mark Juergensmeyer in his essay, ‘Saint Gandhi’ suggests that Gandhi may have been putting us on in dressing like a mahatma. He remarks that ‘Gandhi seems to have become a saint by pretense and enticement.’ Gandhi he suggests from time to time cultivated a saintly demeanor in ways that took advantage of Western credulity (Juergensmeyer 1987: 193 passim).

10 Toward the end of 1934 Gandhi retired from Congress to set up the AIVIA, the All-India Village Industries Association, for ‘the economic, moral, and hygienic uplift of the rural population.’ He wanted to facilitate the creation of local village industries that would supply local village markets (Green 1993: 327–28).

11 For an account of Gandhi’s transformation of the Congress at the Nagpur session of the Congress in December 1920 see Rudolph and Rudolph 2006: chapter 8, 230–52).

12 These are questions raised by Leo Tolstoy (1987). For a discussion of how Gandhi and Max Weber intersect with Tolstoy in relation to these questions, see Rudolph and Rudolph 2006: 19. Being aware of these questions helped Gandhi to reject another philosophical dichotomy: that between consciousness and conscience (Chatterjee 2005: 12–13).

13 That Nehru viewed religion as false and dangerous knowledge is attested to by what he had to say about it in his autobiography. ‘The spectacle of what is called religion … in India and elsewhere has filled me with horror, and I have frequently condemned it and wished to make a clean sweep of it … It seems to me to stand for … dogma and bigotry, superstition and exploitation … ’ (Nehru 1958: 241).

14 According to T.N. Madan, Nehru’s secularism is ‘the dream of a minority which wants to … impose its will upon history but lacks the power to do so . . . ’ (Madan 1987: 748).

15 For a comprehensive, analytic and critical analysis of constitutional law relating to religion, see Sen 2010.

16 Durgas Das Basu explains the meaning of the word secular inserted by the 42nd Amendment in 1976 into the preamble of the Constitution as it was interpreted by a nine-judge Bench of the Indian Supreme Court in *Bommai v. Union of India* 1994. The Bench held that the term ‘secular’ not only prohibited the state from establishing any religion of its own but also ‘enjoining it to accord equal treatment to all religions … ’ (emphasis in the original). It is notable that the insertion of the word ‘secular’ in the Preamble to the Constitution was not interpreted by the Supreme Court in a Nehruvian manner, although that was likely to have been Indira Gandhi’s intent when she had the word ‘secular’ added to the Preamble by the 42nd Amendment.

17 Green 1993: 91.

18 Gandhi 1997: 120. The following books are recommended for perusal to follow up the study of the foregoing: *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, Tolstoy; *What is Art?*, Tolstoy; *The Slavery of Our Times*, Tolstoy; *How Shall We Escape?*, Tolstoy; *The White Slaves of England*, Sherard; *Civilization: Its Cause and Cure*, Carpenter; *The Fallacy of Speed*, Taylor; *A New Crusade*, Blount; *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience*, Thoreau; *Life Without Principle*, Thoreau; *Unto This Last*, Ruskin; *Duties of Man*, Mazzini; *Defence and Death of Socrates*, From Plato; *Paradoxes of Civilization*, Max Nordau; *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*, Naoroji; *Economic History of India*, Dutt; *Village Communities*, Maine. In *Gandhi* and in *Mountain of Truth* Green pioneered the study of the ‘other West’ which, from his student days in London, helped to shape Gandhi and to which Gandhi subsequently contributed.

19 See Mark Juergensmeyer (1986) for a critical discussion of Holmes’s characterization of Gandhi as a saint in a Christian context.

20 Mandela continues: ‘Nonviolence was the official stance of all major African coalitions, and the South African ANC [African National Congress] remained implacable, opposed to violence for most of its existence … I followed the Gandhian strategy for as long as I could … Even then [after adding ‘a military dimension to our struggle’] we chose sabotage because it did not involve the loss of life, and it offered the best hope for future race relations’ (Mandela 1999: 74).


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