

## GANDHI VERSUS GANDHI

### THE END OF SATYA AND THE BEGINNING OF AAGRAHA

In the entire history of the world there is only one occasion when an oppressed people obtained freedom through peaceful means. This unique distinction was the Mahatma's gift to our Nation. Yet, barely four decades since this extraordinary event, India has lost its claims to being a peaceful nation. The grandson of Nehru has symbolised this fall by violating the election codes and aggressing upon the grandson of the Mahatma.

This physical event starkly brings into focus a whole question, a vitally important threshold. Have we nourished and cared for the gift that we have received from the Father of Our Nation? What is the India was we are going to build and bequeath to our children?

#### The Macro Processes

We must try and understand the processes, forces and movements that have all but wiped out the intensely human way of political action and replaced it with violence and untruth. I would like to advance the thesis that the overthrow of the Gandhian path is centred around two dilemmas. FIRSTLY, THE DILEMMA ENSHRINED IN THE IDEA OF THE OLD AND THE NEW; AND SECONDLY, THE DILEMMA OF THE PULL OF THE OBVIOUS AND THE TANGIBLE CONTRASTED WITH THE FAITH IN INNER CONVICTION, I.E., THE SYMBOL AND THE SEARCH. The macro movements and historic forces create the context of the times each one of us lives through. We do not always understand them, but we struggle with contrary pulls and pushes in our lives. We often leave our dilemmas unresolved in our selves and seek their resolution through heroic personalities who symbolise this conflict within. The symbols of the unresolved issues of our times are Mahatma Gandhi and Pundit Nehru.

Mahatma Gandhi inspite of his western education and contemporary background symbolised the awakening of the Indian masses. The 'half naked fakir' mobilised the hopes and the energies of the masses of our country. Every village reverberated with the gentle clicking of the charka. Leaders who responded to the call of the Mahatma arose spontaneously in all corners of the country. They questioned old norms, championed the emancipation of women and the ending of untouchability. The congress as an organised body drew its moral and institutional strength from Gandhiji's message. All the prominent leaders in the congress relied on Gandhiji's charisma. Perhaps because of his very intimate connectedness with the masses, his giving up of all ways of living that differed drastically from the common man, and because of his genius in anchoring his very revolutionary ways in the wisdom of the ancients, Gandhi came to symbolise the old. His insistence on Swadeshi was seen as a step backward into village India. His vision for India was considered impractical. As Swaraj became a

reality, the organisation of the congress party turned its back on the more fundamental principles enunciated by the Mahatma.

Pundit Nehru on the other hand was the cultivated anglicised Indian who came to "Discover India", the modern day Columbus. His understanding of India was derived from study of historical movements. He was the archetype of the educated elite of the country. Educated entirely in England, he represented the supreme sacrifice of the person who had acquired a very viable westernisation giving up the opportunity to exploit his learning. He symbolised the new, the secret desire of the Indian to be accepted as equal by the coloniser; the need for the Indian to be confirmed and appreciated from the western point of view. The compulsive need of the victim to be dignified and loved by the oppressor found its champion in Pundit Nehru.

The fragmentation between the old and the new, and the contrary pulls of the search and the symbol are personified by these two men.

What is the nature of this fragmentation? What energies do they mobilise? What processes do they unleash?

### The Old and the New

Every action choice that man makes goes hand in hand with creating opportunities to develop some aspects of himself and society while suppressing and submerging others. When choices of social organisation and cultural norms get established, this pattern of opportunity and suppression become a living condition. The individual processes find reflection in the societal processes. Some groups end up with privileges and others become under-privileged, just as each individual finds legitimacy for contempt. Changes in such conditions could come from within or from the outside. Such changes are often heralded by extraordinary individuals who rise above the given reality and have deep insights into the negatives of the contemporary conditions. In India such resolution and renewal have always come from saints and sages. People who have risen above the norms and traditions of the time but deeply rooted in an inner spiritual human quest. From the times of the Buddha and Mahavira, the Upanishadic Sages through to the Bhakti saints and Suri Mystics, this has been India's path. Gandhi walked the path of this tradition. But, the political condition of the time gave his action an added dimension. Social change was superimposed by the obvious struggle for power and freedom.

At the threshold of a change, the words old and new take on very powerful emotive meanings. The old represents all the dark, unenlightened, dead conformities, unquestioned norms, unexamined beliefs and the like that oppress man. The old is the past that must be left behind.

The new represents bright, intelligent, progressive, free and inviting spaces, fresh beginnings that give hope to man. The new is the future destiny that beckons each person and he must embrace it with both arms.

The language of the leaders of such times get heavily laced with the vocabulary, imagery and mythology of this fragmentation. The energy that the 'new' can mobilise is directly related to and dependent upon the oppression experienced through the "old". When the vision of the new is founded upon a deeply human, compassionate and spiritual base, it takes the form of a self propelling wave. It sweeps millions of people and spans vast times. The Buddhas words still ring fresh in our ears. But, when the call for the new is superficial, when it relates only to externals and is based on intellectual forecasts it can only mobilise opportunism, escape and a scramble to acquire the material benefits arising out of the change. Without the deep inward energy of truth and compassion, it will not move man. The act of gaining independence created a very powerful context in which the "old and the new" became the operative metaphor. Unfortunately, it also represents a discontinuity between the direction created by Gandhiji and the direction chosen by Nehru. A deep inward search gave way to a superficial vision.

The struggle for Swatantra and Swadeshi decayed into a superficial change; an opening up of opportunities for a changed order of power and wealth. The evidence for this lies in the fact that except for the colour and nationality of the rulers having changed, there is very little change in the process of governing our Nation. The laws follow the colonisers precedent. The government bureaucracy has not changed in structure in its mission, or its norms and culture. The Educational patterns remains largely unaltered, even the books and the rendering of the History of the nation remain the same. Industrial Organisations operate with imported knowledge and alien management philosophies. They are becoming the leading edge of a mind colonisation. But, access to political and economic power has opened up, the societal balances between castes has changed. Thus the more opportunities and violent have grabbed the new instruments of power. Some of the earlier struggles for political and economic power were played out within the bounds of values and dignity. Today the forces welling up to grab a piece of the cake, act from a named lust for power. The frustration caused by a belied hope in the emergence of a truly developmental context adds fuel to the fire.

With the relegation of the old, a whole host of Indian tradition languishes. The metaphor and practice of science and technology in India, the continuity of village crafts, the regeneration of Indian design in architecture and art have all been marginalised. The owner of a westernised training in technology holds the power and makes decision. An indigenous scholar in any field of learning has to languish and be at the mercy of the new breed of petty officials and managers.

A new intellectual middle class has joined a new power elite to usher in a bastardised western modality of growth and development. This attempt would be

welcome were it possible to cut oneself off cleanly and completely from one's background and one's heritage. But since that is clearly impossible both individually and collectively, the disturbance caused by the superficial call for the new and in our case, for westernisation, technologisation and politicisation can only unleash self-centred, power-hungry reactionary forces.

The metaphor of the old and the new is not only false in the sense that it fragments the reality of the here and now, it is false also because it creates a context for action that is hollow and unsubstantial. It evokes mirages, superficial non-enduring action and short-term gains. It takes one's attention away from the real issues of the here and the now. The metaphor of Gandhiji was based on confronting the truth, introspection, self-purification and assertion without aggression or violence. Satyagraha compelled one to stay with the burning human issues, delve deeply into an exploration of the condition of the present, in the now, and discover one's response to it and act powerfully but peacefully. The new in his vision, is an unfolding and flowering of this quest.

### The individual's dilemma : The Search and the Symbol

Let us take a closer look at these processes that compel an individual to respond to rapid change. Change in the technology of living, in political, economic and social order places enormous strain on people. A culture of transience sets in and the imperatives of transitions to new ways of living unleash deep anxieties and fears. This outburst of feelings is a powerful force. When this force cathects to a movement that is a deep search into one's tradition and history it leads a wave of meaningful and peaceful change. In the absence of such an institutional space, this force becomes cathartic and violent. It clings to symbols of past glory and stability. The movement is superficial but it provides safety in membership. The following and leaders of this movement are terrified of abandoning the external anchors that seem to provide security, belonging and identity.

A movement from a past into the future challenges beliefs and cultural traditions very deeply. Through the ages, through successive invasions into India, the indigenous culture has been through many shocks. But, we have always found ways of assimilating the new people who came in and their philosophy. Their identities were never threatened while space was given for a new social balance. The beautiful story of how the Parsees found a new home in India illustrates this strength of our people. The external norms and practices were never the source of conflict. The ability to act from deep faith, humanness and dignity for the self and others was the central issue. A Dharmic existence and code was the demand. The institutions of search were vibrant.

The changes that have come in the wake of the Independence seem to have altered all this. Let us look at the case of Ayodhya. For many years (as far as living memory goes), the spot now claimed as Ram Janma Bhoomi has been the place that thousands of devotees would visit around Ramanavami day. Earlier there was a stone to mark the spot and early in this century a small idol was installed.

Whatever the historical events that led to the Babri Masjid being built, the tradition of simple folk visiting the Ram Janma Bhoomi carried on in a peaceful way. It lived through uncomplicated faith and no communal tensions have resulted from it till recently.

Today it has become a symbol of a resurgent Hindu psyche! Have we regressed so far in our thinking that events that are almost a thousand years old have become powerful reminders of hurt? The word Hindu was coined by 16<sup>th</sup> century Jesuits. They had to define the religious phenomenon they wished to attack and conquer. How come we have internalised both the word and the need to attack another faith in order to proclaim our own?

The word Dharma refers to action that will nourish the well being of all forms of life. What then is the meaning of the statement "Hum apne dharma ko nahi chodenge" of an AK 47 wielding self proclaimed defender of the faith?

The more regressive processes that are rampant today could be the ripening of the sentiments that marginalised Gandhi during and immediately after 1947. The forces of integration and living in mutual dignity that Kabir, Guru Nanak, Chaitanya, Appar and a host of bhakti saints had nurtured has given way to the divisive designs of the coloniser. A people whose faith in the Divine was kept alive by the words and lives of saints and sages, have given allegiance to dogmatic priests and mullas. The trust in inner conviction and the power of truth gave way to outer conformism and the power of violent demand. The symbol was obliterated the search. This then is the deeper dilemma triggered by the forces of history; the dilemma of choice between introspection and discovery in the face of the challenges on the one hand and a blind clinging on to symbols of security on the other hand.

### The relationship between the dilemmas

The processes in the realm of the psyche closely parallel the processes that led to change in political and economic power. Gandhi was a deeply religious man. Nehru was a modern intellectual. Gandhi evoked the faith and trust of a people. Nehru spoke eloquently of a vision of new Indian that touched the dreams of the elite.

The old and the universe of faith have much in common. They are experienced in ones feelings and are seldom given form. Articulating them and defining them are almost impossible. They are a quiet background upon which one acts out the drama of ones life; their strengths are implicit and taken for granted while their negatives are explicit and call for attention. Ones being is soaked in them while ones thoughts and dreams roam free. One awakens to them only when they are lost and one feels empty within.

The political and religious dramas that have burst upon us in the recent past must surely touch each one of us. While neither of them are desirable both of

them reflect our own inner processes. They seem superficial and external in their expression but reveal an erosion of human values in general and the cultural positives of our country in particular.

Can we build new Institutions for today?

There are many questions we as a nation and each one of us as individuals must confront. With our action and inaction alike, what kind of a world are we creating? Do we have a philosophy and belief that are human or have we become instruments of acquisition? Our nation holds in its bosom the traditions of all mankind's greatest thinkers - do we learn how to integrate them and draw great resources from these treasures or are they going to become the seeds of fragmentation and violence?

Do we go on from swaraj into becoming a desh, swadeshi and swatantra or do we decay into fragments, remain paradeshi and parantantra? Can we discover new institutions of faith and quest meaningful for today?

Raghu Ananthanarayanan