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Bindu Puri

The Tagore–Gandhi Debate on Matters of Truth and Untruth

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To my parents Mrinal and Sujata Miri,
my husband Sanjay Puri
and my sister Puja Miri Yajnik

Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to write a few words by way of a Foreword to this significant contribution to the vast literature on Mahatma Gandhi and his friend and adversary in debate, Rabindranath Tagore. I consider this work as a significant contribution for a number of reasons. While there are a great many commentaries and exegetical writings in that area by Gandhians and Tagore specialists, there are very few scholarly studies by professional philosophers. Moreover, this work displays considerable originality in several ways. For the first time Dr. Bindu Puri makes a systematic exposition of the influence of Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra* on Gandhi's thinking. We also see a searching interrogation of the authoritative interpretation of the cognitive status of Gandhi's notion of Truth made recently by Prof. Akeel Bilgrami (Bilgrami 2006, 2011). Again, in using Tagore's creative writings, his plays and novels, to throw light on his philosophical stance in respect of, inter alia, the notion of "moral tyranny", Puri breaks new ground. When attention was drawn in 1997 to the significance of the debates between Gandhi and Tagore, through a collection of documents (Bhattacharya 2008), the focus was on situating the debate in the context of political and intellectual history. Now, philosophers are extending our understanding in respect of that debate. Many of the issues they touch upon are beyond my ken but, as a student of intellectual history, I might share with the readers of this work some thoughts which cross my mind as I consider those issues to raise a few questions.

The focus in this book is on the central idea of "Truth" in Gandhi and Tagore's writings and my questions are generated by the discussion on that subject. I think that there is one aspect of their philosophical outlook which needs more attention than it has received: The presence of the ineffable. One encounters that very often while reading their writings on how they looked upon the world. One may find it baffling, difficult to understand or sympathize with, but an ineffability of Truth, sometimes posited as a divine entity, is too recurrent to be set aside. Tagore often resorted to the Upanisadic exposition, "Satyam jñānam anantam brahman yo veda nihitam guhayam…". In Tagore's translation, "Brahman, the true, the all-conscious is the infinite hidden in the depths of the soul". This is an oft-quoted passage which Tagore deploys in his exposition in his work *Sādhanā* in 1913 to develop the idea

that there are experiences which "words can never describe" (Tagore 2001: 344). "Yato vācho nivartante aprāpya manasā…". In Tagore's translation: "From Brahman words come back baffled, as well as the mind…" (Tagore 2001: 343). Tagore goes on to say that "intellectual knowledge is partial… By the process of knowledge we can never know the infinite being". In his sermons at Santiniketan, translated by him and collected in a work entitled by his publishers *The Thoughts of Tagore*, he again speaks of "the inevitable mystery" of divinity (Tagore 2008: 74). In his address to the University of Dhaka, "The Religion of an Artist", Tagore said that his religion was derived "from vision, not from knowledge" (Tagore 2008: 689). In his Hibbert Lectures at Oxford in 1930, published under the title *The Religion of Man*, Tagore made a similar statement (p. 127). Thus, Tagore, a word smith by vocation, repeatedly says that words fail him in describing the Truth as the Divine entity and he appears to take for granted the Upanisadic identification of *Satyam* with *Brahman*. Thus, Tagore elaborated several times on the limits of cognitive knowledge.

Mahatma Gandhi was equally aware of the ineffable. Consider, for instance, his statement about "the indescribable luster of Truth", how he "can hardly convey an idea" of his "fleeting glimpse" of Truth (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol. II: 752). Gandhi's statements about the "inner voice" also lend themselves to a similar interpretation, that there are messages which are beyond the ken of human knowledge and language (Gandhi, in Prabhu and Rao 2007: 32). Or again consider Gandhi's confession about the "weakness and imperfections of mine", which evoked from him "the silent cry"—"the silent cry goes out to Truth" (pp. 46–47). The cry is silent; it cannot be expressed in words. In 1934, when Gandhi responded to Tagore's protest against Gandhi's statement that the earthquake in Bihar was divine retribution for the sin of practising untouchability, in Gandhi's statement one sees a similar message from some inner voice and an appeal to things ineffable. "Knowledge of the tallest scientist or the greatest spiritualist is like a particle of dust… I submit that we do not know the law or the laws fully,… We do not know the universal laws sufficiently". That was Gandhi, in *Harijan*, February 1934 (Gandhi, in Bhattacharya 2008, pp. 159–160). This statement is like Tagore's, on the limits of what is knowable, but Tagore made a distinction betweens the knowable one can reach with Reason and the unknowable: "God himself has given the mind sovereignty in the material world" and in that domain, Tagore thought, it was necessary "to reinstate Reason on its throne" because there was "enough of magic in this country… and all kinds of divine intervention in mundane affairs" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008: 82). To Gandhi there is no difference between mundane affairs, laws of nature and divine will. "I believe literally that not a leaf moves but by His will. Every breath I take depends on his sufferance". That was his statement in 1934 after the Bihar earthquake and he added. "With me the connection between cosmic phenomena and human behaviour is a living faith that draws me nearer to my God" (Gandhi, in Bhattacharya 2008: 161). Having noted this difference between Tagore and Gandhi, we must recognize that in the realm where man faces a divine entity, the ineffable nature of Truth or divinity, the limits

of the path of knowledge as a means of attaining Truth beyond the material domain, Gandhi and Tagore were in agreement.

What does it all mean? What is this ineffability? Ludwig Wittgenstein, we are told by Ray Monk, shared Tagore's belief that reason and knowledge were irrelevant to ineffable religious experience. Wittgenstein read in 1921 Tagore's *King of the Dark Chamber,* an allegory of religious experience, by a German translator, and later he read Tagore's own translation in English, and eventually Wittgenstein, along with his friend Yorick Smythies, prepared a version of their own of one part of that work which they considered important. According to Monk, "Tagore expressed Wittgenstein's own religious ideal". Like Tagore, Wittgenstein did not look for reason for God's existence and in his lectures on religious belief Wittgenstein focussed upon "the denial of the necessity to have reasons for religious beliefs" (Monk 1991: 408–410). It is not necessary for us to accompany Wittgenstein down the path he followed parallel to Tagore's, but it is necessary to remind ourselves that Wittgenstein does not stand alone. Hannah Arendt provides in her last published work *The Life of the Mind* a brilliant exposition of the ineffable and something other than reason in the thoughts of many philosophers.

> The great philosophers, in contrast to the cocksureness of their inferior brethren, have almost unanimously insisted on something 'ineffable' behind the written words. In retrospect, we are tempted to see these ever-recurring utterances as attempts to warn the reader that he was in danger of a fatal mistake in understanding: what were offered him were thoughts, not cognitions, not solid pieces of knowledge, although they had not escaped but even haunted human reason (Arendt 1971: 114–115).

Arendt goes on talk about "the Platonic [sense of] wonder" and Aristotle's perception of "truth that refused to be expressed in discourse". And on to Nietzsche and then Heidegger's notion that "the spoken word receives its determination from the ineffable", and finally to Wittgenstein "whose philosophical investigations centre on the ineffable" (Arendt 1971: 115–125).

Apart from providing illuminating instances of parallelism in thought, Arendt's discussion of the ineffable in philosophical thought points to an explanation of the metaphorical style of Gandhi when he talks of the effulgent light of Truth, or Tagore speaks of the Unseen King. It is a style that was somewhat baffling, especially in Tagore. However, as Arendt says, metaphor belongs to "the non-cognitive way of thinking, to overcome the limits of language" (Arendt 1971: 124) and she cites Wittgenstein's aphorism that it is the job of philosophy to uncover the bumps that intellect gets by running its head up against the limits of language.

Needless to say, the poet Tagore's writings abound in metaphors. I have argued elsewhere that many of Gandhi's statements are also in the metaphorical mode and it will be a mistake to read them as descriptive statements regarding reality (Bhattacharya 2011a: 58–64). A major instance is *Hind Swaraj.* His denunciation of Western civilization, his essentialization of the West as the repository of values such as gross materialism and selfish self-indulgence, is difficult to understand unless we interpret it as metaphorical. Gandhi was familiar enough with Europe, or at least England, to know that the Western civilization was not so homogeneous, that it was

a complex entity which also included exemplars of a culture and style of thinking different from the characteristics he attributed to the Western civilization; in fact, in the very same work, *Hind Swaraj*, he quotes Western thinkers like John Ruskin, Tolstoy, Henry D. Thoreau, Edward Carpenter and others who contested materialism and all that was closely associated with it. Therefore, the only acceptable interpretation of Gandhi's representation of the West in that work is to read it as a metaphorical device where the Western and the much-lauded Indian civilizations represent two aspects of the human mind and two sets of values in contraposition. We shall do Gandhi injustice in making a literal interpretation of what he spoke of metaphorically in the civilizational discourse. That applies with greater force to the pronouncements on Truth/God by both Gandhi and Tagore. There is no doubt that their style of thinking and metaphorical exposition was familiar to this Indian audience and possibly enhanced the appreciation they received.

If what has been said above about the presence of the ineffable in the thoughts of Gandhi and Tagore is true, we need to recognize two things. First, despite their differences in respect of many issues, *there is a family resemblance between their thoughts and style of thinking about Truth/God.* This might contain the key to a possible reconciliation between differing interpretations of their thoughts in terms of a cognitive/non-cognitive binary. Second, that convergence of the approach in Gandhi's and Tagore's thoughts reveals *a common high ground which they shared and that helps to explain how they resolved or bypassed differences* between them on many issues which appear to us irreconcilable. The first of these inferences may be of interest to philosophers; the second is of interest to historians and biographers.

The intellectual companionship and friendship between Gandhi and Tagore, adversaries in many debates, is usually explained by their biographers in terms of their mutual regard. But there is perhaps something more to it than that. Four years after Tagore's death Gandhi visited Santiniketan and looked back upon the long years of their friendship from 1915 till Tagore's death in 1941. "I started with a disposition to detect a conflict between Gurudev [Tagore] and myself, but ended with the glorious discovery that there was none" (Kripalani 1980: 339). Arguably, Gandhi's conviction in this regard is based upon his perception of a common ground where their thinking converged; as I had surmised in my editorial Introduction to a collection of documents on the Gandhi–Tagore debate in 1997, "The difference between them was real and at the same time they shared a common high ground above the terrain of differences" (Bhattacharya 2008: 35). In their thinking about what they perceived as the ultimately ineffable realization of Truth/God, obscure as their exposition was at times (I hope to be pardoned for saying so), there was a common bond.

The other point that emerges from our discussion about their style of thinking is that we need to look at many of their statements about 'Truth' contextually so as not to miss the family resemblances between them. We have to bear in mind what I may call, for want of a better word, the 'meaning horizon' of some key concepts they use so that we do not dislodge a concept from the context in which it was used. The meaning horizon, understood in terms of the original root word 'bounding', places limits on the meaning of a statement or action intended by the subject, and it moves

as the subject changes location, just as the physical horizon seen by an observer moves as he changes location.

The "meaning horizon" in Gandhi's discourse on some crucially important concepts shifts, sometimes imperceptibly. Consider for instance his notion of *ahimsa* in different contexts. In 1921, he propounded the idea that for the mill workers in Bombay to go on strike for wage increase or to register protest was an act of violence, a violation of the *ahimsa* principle (Gandhi 1921). Another context: his comment on his effort to raise recruits for the British army in the First World War and his earlier participation in the ambulance service during the Boer War in 1899 was as follows: "I draw no distinction between those who wield the weapons of destruction and those who do Red Cross work. Both participate in war and advance its cause. Both are guilty of crimes of war" (Gandhi, in Bose 1948: 175–176, cited in this volume, in Chap. 3). He almost talks in terms of "practical reason" when he says here:

> There is no defence of my conduct only in the scale of *ahimsa*…. Life is governed by a multitude of forces. It would be smooth sailing if one could determine the course of one's action only by one general principle whose application at a given moment was too obvious to need even a moment's reflection. But I cannot recall a single act which could be so easily determined.

Consider at the other end of the scale statements like this: "…*ahimsa* means the largest love, greatest charity. If I am a follower of *ahimsa* I must love the enemy. I must apply the same rules to the wrong doer who is my enemy…", etc. (Gandhi, in Bose 1948: 157–158, cited in this volume, Chap. 2). Puri in this volume shows other examples of the various meanings of the term *ahimsa* in Gandhi's usage. For example, Gandhi thought that the fast he undertook in defence of Ahmedabad mill workers' claim to higher wages was "not perfect" in terms of *ahimsa* principle because that action was obviously not a good thing for the mill owners. In some contexts Gandhi, in speaking of the "non-violence of thought", made the intention in the mind of the actor the criterion. "The essence of violence is that there must be a violent intention behind a thought, word, or act, i.e. an intention to do harm to the opponents so-called" (Gandhi, in Bose 1948: 157). That leads to a totally subjectivist definition of *ahimsa* in some contexts.

The shifts in the meaning horizon need to be appreciated if we are to generalize across the board about what Gandhi's ideas were. That is to say, we need to look at the contextual particularities before we make generalizations about the structural characteristics of his thought system. In *My Experiments With Truth* and elsewhere Gandhi himself often commented on the changes his ideas underwent in course of his intellectual life. I venture to suggest that a historical approach is therefore needed in our effort to understand Gandhi's words.

Perhaps it is easier to understand Tagore's position vis-à-vis the notion of Truth and the related concepts which are open to different interpretations in different moral and experiential contexts. That does not mean that Tagore's thoughts in this regard belong to a superior level in any sense, it is just that he appears to make a clear distinction between two domains: the mundane which man inhabits, and the

"supreme firmament" to which man looks up. In the latter domain, as we have seen earlier, Tagore looks at the ineffable *Satyam* or *Brahman,* something beyond what he called the "process of knowledge" and the reach of reason. On the other hand—and here he parts company with Gandhi—in the world man actually inhabits, cognitive truths, Tagore maintained, are the key to understanding mundane material reality. Hence, he reacts strongly against divine injunction and moral precepts being mixed up with issues which are to be settled by man by exercising his mind, his reasoning power. Therefore, Tagore tended to emphasize the cognitive understanding of things as they are in the material world, while Gandhi would rather underline the moral values in the experience of Truth. Hence, in 1934 when Gandhi attributes the disastrous Bihar earthquake to divine retribution for the sin of casteism, Tagore protests: We should not "associate ethical principles with cosmic phenomena…. [P]hysical catastrophes have their inevitable and exclusive origin in a certain combination of physical facts". Further, Tagore cited a social reason for that position when he said that a great leader of men like Gandhi should refrain from "emphasising the elements of unreason" in the minds of his countrymen (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008: 158). Or again, in 1921 Tagore protested when Gandhi described the use of foreign cloth as sinful. "I consider it is a sin to wear foreign cloth…. I do not draw a sharp distinction between economics and ethics" (Gandhi, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 159). Contesting that view, Tagore argued: "economics is bundled out and a fictitious moral dictum is dragged into its place"; the question what cloth should be purchased "belongs mainly to economic science" and it would be appropriate to think in terms of "the language of economics" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008: 83). There are many other such instances where Tagore was compelled to state his differences with Gandhi, and thus to define the meaning horizon of truths in terms of the distinction he made between the material world and the higher domain where the spirit of man pursues transcendental Truth.

Our discussion will be incomplete unless we address another major difference between Tagore and Gandhi in their approach to Truth: Tagore's emphasis on aesthetics and Gandhi's on ethics. Tagore's ideas in this regard were complex and for our present purposes we can perhaps say that he made three basic points in various works like his Hibbert Lectures in Oxford, his collections of essays entitled Sādhanā and *Personality*, and in his conversations with Albert Einstein. First, he believed that the urge for creation of Beauty, as well as the search for Knowledge of "the knowable world" in truths of science, are both part of man's personality. In his Hibbert Lectures on "the religion of man" he argued that "Man is by nature an artist" (Tagore 2008: 139). "Through our sense of truth we realize laws in creation, and through our sense of beauty we realize harmony in the universe" (Tagore 2001: 335). Second, "the truth of art is in the disinterested joy of creation" (Tagore 2008: 50). The act of creating something beautiful is "superfluous for biological existence" (p. 107), it is something unnecessary which is produced solely for the joy of creation. The idea of 'the superfluous' or 'the surplus' figures quite prominently in Tagore's writings on Beauty in the company of Truth. "The animals must have knowledge, so that their knowledge can be employed for useful purposes in their life. But there they stop…. But man has a surplus where he can proudly assert that

knowledge is for the sake of knowledge" (Tagore 2001: 351). It is this "surplus" in man which pushes beyond what is necessary for self-preservation and "upon this fund of surplus science and philosophy survive…. Man has a fund of emotional energy which is not all occupied with his self-preservation. This surplus seeks its outlet in the creation of Art…" (Tagore 2001: 352). Having thus put search for Truth and Beauty on the same plane, Tagore also postulated that both of them are part of the "human universe", inexistent outside of that. This third proposition was challenged by Albert Einstein in his conversations with Tagore. In *Sādhanā*, the poet suggested a likeness between the search for truth and the creation of beauty in that both are part of the endeavour of man towards the realization of the "universal mind" (Tagore 2008: 205). In his conversations with Einstein he elaborated on these ideas; it seems that these two great minds were drawn to each other and they met and had long conversations five times between 1926 and 1930 (Bhattacharya 2011b: 197–200). We do not have records of their conversations except for two meetings, and in these Tagore postulates that neither Truth nor Beauty are "independent of man"; and further that there is a "universal mind" and there was an ongoing process of "perpetual reconciliation" between that and the more limited individual human mind. Einstein dodges that bit about the "universal mind" but he definitely differs from Tagore as regards the dependence of truth on human observation. He is willing to concede to Tagore that in the absence of human beings "the Apollo of Belvedere would no longer be beautiful"; but he believes firmly that truth, say as in the Pythagorus theorem, remains the truth "independent of humanity". Tagore's riposte is that not only Beauty but also Truth as well is after all reached only "by the organ of thought which is human" (Tagore 2008: 911–915). I think it is fair to say that the debate remained unresolved.

Unlike Tagore's scheme of things, in Gandhi's what mattered was ethics and not aesthetics and hence his emphasis on "virtue". "We advise every one", wrote the editor of *Indian Opinion* in 1908, "to turn his mind again and again to Socrates's words and conduct" (Gandhi 1947, vol. 8: 305). That was editor M.K. Gandhi's advice to his readers in South Africa and it was preceded by a reproduction of the proceedings of the trial of Socrates and his last speech and utterances, serialized over several weeks. The first of these articles on Socrates carried Gandhi's prefatory statement: "Socrates was a *satyagrahi*". And Gandhi exhorted the readers: "We must learn to live and die like Socrates" (p. 244, et. seq.). Recently, Richard Sorabji has discussed Gandhi's ideas in the light of the philosophy of the Stoics (Sorabji 2012). As regards Plato, it is not known whether Gandhi was familiar with the *Dialogues of Plato*, of which an authoritative translation by Benjamin Jowett was published in 1892 (see Jowett 1892/1937). Jowett's eminence as a scholar was conceded even in the Balliol students' jokes and a doggerel was heard in Oxford many decades later: "I am Benjamin Jowett/Master of Balliol College/All that is knowledge I know it/What I don't know isn't knowledge". It may be worthwhile to note Jowett's commentary:

> The nature of virtue is a subject which is frequently treated by Plato. In the earlier dialogues the Socratic thesis that 'virtue is knowledge', appears under various forms and is brought to bear on almost every argument, nor does it lose its hold over Plato's mind until we reach the very latest stage of his philosophy (Jowett 1892/1937, vol. II: 933).

Jowett takes us through *Protagoras* and *Meno* and *Phaedo* to the *Laws*, to reach the conclusion that Plato at the end arrives at a conception of 'virtue' which is in the neighbourhood of religion (Jowett 1892/1937, vol. II: 934). Eventually, Plato's thought displayed "a religious or theological rather that an intellectual character" (p. 934). Among the many parallels that one may find between Plato's *Dialogues* and Gandhi's world outlook, the most important perhaps is the discussion on "virtue". Gandhi's own style of thinking on that issue appears to approximate to what is said to be the later Platonic position.

No doubt the five virtues which appear in Plato's *Dialogues*—wisdom, courage, temperance, justice and holiness (the latter was sometimes subsumed under justice) —are different from those Gandhi holds up. Gandhi derived what he calls the "cardinal virtues" from the Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra*: *ahimsa*, *satya, asteya, brahmacharya, aparigraha*. But the difference diminishes of you look at interpretation on both sides, often elevating these virtues to a higher plane than the literal meaning. Thus. for instance, in the *Laws*, Book I, and in the *Dialogues* courage is interpreted as not only endurance of pain but resistance to pleasure (Jowett 1892/1937, vol. II: 417, 633), or again 'temperance' is equated with avoidance of excessive wealth (Jowett 1892/1937, vol. II: 583, 936). Gandhi likewise interpreted *brahmacharya* (celibacy) as "control over all the organs of sense", *asteya* (non-stealing) as freedom from greed, *aparigraha* (non-possession) as 'non-attachment' to possessions. There are other ways in when one may find parallels between Gandhi and Platonic thinking on this question, e.g. both talk of major and minor virtues, or premier and dependent virtues in a strangely similar way. The more important thing was that Gandhi rescued the popularly received version of the *Yoga Sūtra* from a focus on *vratam*s alone, to emphasize the cardinal virtues; perhaps the ideas of *Protagoras* had been similarly reinterpreted to a higher philosophical level in Plato's *Dialogues*. It is all very well to look askance today at the "traditional" in Gandhian thought and his *Yoga Sūtra*, but let us recall that historically his was a vast task of replacing a great deal of mumbo-jumbo in the praxis and belief-system which prevailed in his days, with ideas which elevated the discourse of Hinduism to a higher plane. Given that agenda, his emphasis on the "virtues" is understandable. Tagore was evidently more inclined to allow freedom of reason greater space than "virtues" derived from the scriptures. But he was not unaware of the error of exaggerating the polarities, and he said over and again that he was with Gandhi in a common endeavour. Gandhi as well as Tagore were looking at the ethical basis of a new polity that was to be brought into existence, they were not just trading words. That was what their debate was about.

Sabyasachi Bhattacharya

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Preface

The debate between Gandhi and Tagore appeared to have been about many things: *satyagraha*, the non-cooperation movement, the boycott of educational institutions, *swadeshi* and the burning of foreign cloth, Gandhi's *mantra* that "*swaraj* can be attained by the *charkha*" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008: 109) and the possibilities of self-mortification in Gandhi's fasts. However, one can argue that Tagore's exchanges with Gandhi did not constitute a set of disconnected arguments. These arguments could be reinterpreted as Tagore's efforts to articulate his insights about the possibilities of untruth in Gandhi's conception of the *proper* means to the truth/*satya*. The arguments exchanged between them also brought out the differences between their conflicting understandings of freedom/*swaraj*. Consequently, the issues that divided Gandhi and Tagore were more fundamental than can be imagined by looking at the immediate terms of their exchange. This book tells the story of the Gandhi–Tagore debate. It argues that the debate was primarily about truth, possibilities of untruth and the nature of freedom/*swaraj*.

It is important to state how this volume differs from earlier accounts of the Gandhi–Tagore debate. For one, there has been no complete volume on this debate apart from Prof. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya's book which compiles the details of the exchange itself. Accounts of the debate form single chapters or parts of chapters (Raychaudhuri 1999; Sen 2005; Sengupta 2005; Vajpeyi 2012) in books that are primarily dedicated to other issues. More substantively, while most commentators have noted the differences between them they have argued that there was a more fundamental agreement which underlies the differences. For instance, Prof. Tapan Raychaudhuri has argued that the "genuine differences in opinion and world view have deflected attention from the vast areas of agreement between the two" (Raychaudhuri 1999: 141). In the same spirit, Prof. Sengupta argues "… it is fair to conclude, beneath the level of differences in their thinking, there was a very real resonance between their fundamental positions" (Sengupta 2005: 50). In contrast, Amartya Sen has argued that the Indian tradition was characterized by features such as rationality, debate, heterodoxy, scepticism, pluralism and toleration of difference. This (in his view) is what made it an "argumentative tradition". Sen's discussion of the issues that separated Gandhi and Tagore and the issues that brought them

together is part of a larger argument, which is that the Indian tradition itself (from its earliest political beginnings) had made space for disagreement and difference. Therefore, this tradition had laid the basis for the adoption of democracy and secularism in India (Sen 2005).

This book denies that there was any “real resonance” (Sengupta 2005: 50) between the philosophical categories in terms of which Tagore and Gandhi thought of freedom, truth, possibilities of untruth and modes of resistance. The book argues that the differences between Tagore and Gandhi can be understood in two ways. At one level there was a discussion of the immediate issues which divided them while at another level these arguments were only symptomatic of deeper divergences which need to be philosophically interpreted. Any reinterpretation must examine Tagore’s reservations about Gandhi’s conception of freedom as moral self mastery involving “unquestioning obedience” (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008: 78) to moral rules. Consequently, a rethinking of this debate involves an interpretation of Gandhi’s relationship to tradition, his dialogue with the traditional formulations of virtues, his fundamental moral insights and his conception of truth. The book argues that an examination of this debate must take serious note of the fundamental philosophical differences between Gandhi and Tagore. However, this must not be taken to deny the areas of agreement between them. For instance, it cannot be ignored, that both Gandhi and Tagore came closest in their attitude towards the nature. They rejected the anthropocentricism of modernity and shared a sense of wonder in living life in an enchanted cosmos.

However one may wonder what is the point of making a *philosophical* enquiry into the Gandhi and Tagore debate .There are two reasons that can be offered in answer to this question. Firstly the debate is important to understanding Gandhi as a philosopher. For the debate is about Tagore’s criticisms of Gandhi’s central notions and Gandhi’s efforts to explain his ideas. As Sorabji has recently argued: “Gandhi was indeed a thinker and he offered philosophical reasons for what he thought” (Sorabji 2012: 1). According to Sorabji two of the possible ways in which Gandhi's explanations can be characterized as philosophical, are as follows: “First, Gandhi did more than any philosopher…to subject his ideas to criticism through his daily and weekly writing, much of it nationwide. Second, he often gave reasons of a philosophical kind” (Sorabji 2012: 196). It is noteworthy that this debate brings out at their best the philosophical character of Gandhi’s reasons for what he thought and did. The debate also makes it clear that Gandhi welcomed (in fact, often invited) criticism and was ready to think seriously about it. It is therefore the central task of this book to bring out the contribution that this debate can make to a philosophical rethinking of Gandhi’s fundamental ideas and arguments.

The other reason for looking at the debate is to bring out the contribution which it made to the creation of India. Perhaps one can say that this contribution continues to be as relevant today as when it was first made. The debate between Tagore and Gandhi made the fairly significant point that the central issue confronting colonial Indians was to determine what was meant by *swaraj*/freedom and what were the proper means to attain *swaraj*. Both Tagore and Gandhi argued that Indians could only *properly* reconstitute, the individual/collective Indian self/*swa*, after they had

determined what it would mean for all Indians to be free. Such freedom was an essential precondition to the task of rethinking the individual and collective self-identity of the Indian people. In this context, one can consider that both Tagore and Gandhi thought that freedom meant much more than political self-determination. For Gandhi, it meant moral self-rule *qua* progress towards a more authentic human life. For Tagore, it meant that each individual Indian should be free in her mind to respond to reasons in what she did and thought. On either interpretation, individual freedom became a prerequisite to the progress into a more authentic Indian identity. Tagore and Gandhi emphasized that the task of rethinking the collective self of free India/*Hind Swaraj* would be seriously threatened if Indians engaged themselves in a revivalist search for the legitimate Indian instead of understanding what it would mean to live a free and properly human life. This is the central message of their debate and consequently of this book about the debate.

One can ask, of course, why it should matter (conceptually and practically) at all that Gandhi and Tagore emphasized the need to define *swaraj*/freedom rather than recover/find the legitimate Indian subject who was to be free. At this point it would be useful to recall Isaiah Berlin's comments made in another context. Berlin has brought out the importance of ideas to "historical movements". He has argued: "… that to understand such movements or conflicts is, above all, to understand the ideas or attitudes to life involved in them, which alone make such movements a part of human history, and not mere natural events" (Berlin 1998: 193). It seems apparent that the ideas that informed the debates about India influenced the nature of the movement for India's independence from colonial domination. "These beliefs about how life should be lived, what men and women should be and do…" (Berlin 1998: 1) also significantly influenced the collective Indian imaginations of what free India ought to be like. To come back to the present enquiry, one can argue that the movement for *Hind Swaraj* was indeed influenced by the questions raised by the intellectuals and political leaders who thought about India. These questions had often been framed (prior to the Gandhi–Tagore debate) in terms of enquiries into the authentic self of India. Such enquiries prioritized the quest for the self of India by focusing etymologically on the first particle, in the composite word *swaraj*. That is, the reflexive pronoun *swa* commonly translated as 'self'/or broadly 'to do with the self'. The primary issue in the minds of colonial Indians who responded to concerns about the authentic *swa* in *swaraj* became that of determining who was the legitimate Indian. In these terms, movements for India's freedom often became inextricably linked with revivalist arguments expressing the urgent need to recover the legitimate self of India by going back to her past.

The Gandhi–Tagore debate relocated the central concern in the debates about India. For 26 years, across the pages of the national newspapers, the debate emphasized the composite etymological sense of *swaraj* as 'rule of self by the self' or freedom. The exchanges between Tagore and Gandhi, it may be recalled, were primarily about *swaraj* and what ought to be the *proper* means to *swaraj*. Gandhi spoke about collective participation in non-violent programmes such as *satyagraha, swadeshi* and the burning of foreign cloth, spinning and the non-cooperation movement, as the proper means to both self rule and home rule. Tagore argued that

these programmes were contrary to the spirit of the individual's freedom in the mind as there were possibilities of the coercion of the unique individual in such collective movements. The importance of this shift of attention, from the search for the authentic self of India to the meaning of freedom, can become apparent when one considers that if the colonial Indian quest was defined (as indeed it had been, before and after, this debate) in terms that *prioritized* a search for the legitimate Indian self there would be conflicting results of such a search. The enquiry about the nature of the self of India would *in itself* lead (and indeed had led in the past) to conflicts about legitimacy. It could well emerge that though there were many different individual and collective Indian selves there was no uncontested agreement on the legitimate *Indian*. The quest for collective freedom would be lost, even before it began, if it depended upon a prior answer to the question: 'who was the authentic Indian to be freed/empowered?' On the other hand, if (as Gandhi and Tagore argued) the primary issue confronting colonial Indians was thought of in terms of determining the proper *meaning* of freedom that enquiry itself would become the enabling factor for the individual Indians to rethink the proper self of a plural India. They would then find themselves able to imagine a diverse India collectively as a *free* state. An important consequence of such a relocation of the debate about India from, conflicts about the authentic Indian self to intellectual contestations about the meaning of *swaraj,* was also that it emphasized the need to think seriously about the selection of the *proper* means to *swaraj.*

To appreciate the significance of the shift involved in relocating the debate about India (from the quest for legitimacy to the meaning of freedom) one can look at the etymology of the word *swaraj* itself. *Swaraj* is a complex term derived from two simple Sanskrit terms-*swa* a reflexive particle meaning "self"/or broadly "to do with the self" and *rājya* meaning "mastery" or "rule". Since the first part of the term *swaraj* is the reflexive particle *swa,* which can be translated as the "self", the term *swaraj* can be easily associated with the search for the authentic/true, self/*swa*. This is borne out by the fact that *swaraj* has had a history of association with revivalist movements in India. In such contexts the term has primarily signified not only freedom but the quest to secure freedom for the true/legitimate Indian. One may recall that Shivaji used the term for the first time (in the mid-seventeenth century) in Maharashtra during his attempts to establish a kingdom independent of Mughal authority. At that time the dominant sense of *swaraj* was to emphasize the search for the legitimate self/*swa* of India. *Swaraj* was thought of as a freedom to find, or more properly, to *recover* the authentic Indian self. It meant Maratha/Hindu rule against Muslim/outsider domination. The term *swaraj* continued to exert an influence on debates about India and it was frequently used from about 1885–1947 in the course of anti-colonial struggle. It also had a long history in the politics of the expatriate Indians. However, though much used, *swaraj* was also a much contested term amongst the expatriate Indian community. Tolstoy became an interjector into these contestations when, in response to a letter by Taraknath Das (1884–1958), the editor of the *Free Hindustan*, Tolstoy wrote the "Letter to a Hindoo". He argued (in this letter) that non-violence was the only legitimate means to *swaraj* available for morally upright Indians. Gandhi chanced upon this letter in 1909 (just before he left

London) and he wrote the preface and translated it into Gujarati during the same week that he wrote *Hind Swaraj* in 1909.

Perhaps it is on account of this close association between *swa* and *swaraj* that Ananya Vajpeyi has recently argued, that several hundred years after Shivaji, India's key nationalist figures (Tagore, Gandhi, Nehru, Ambedkar and Abanindranath Tagore) were engaged in a search for "the 'swa' in 'swaraj'" (Vajpeyi 2012: x). They were interested in the answer to the question: "What constitutes India's self?" (p. x). They each thought (in their own ways) that "there was a crisis of self-hood" (p. xiv) and that the "swa would be discovered in the past" (p. xiv).

A contrary and fairly important insight emerges from the consideration of the debate in this book. Namely, that Tagore and Gandhi were *primarily* interested in determining the meaning of *swaraj* or freedom. They argued that it was important that individual Indians realized that the anti-colonial movement was a quest for *swaraj*, rather than a search for the *swa* in *swaraj.* It may be recalled that (as Vajpeyi reminds us), Nehru had once asked the question: "what was this India…." (Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, quoted in Vajpeyi 2012: xi). Aurobindo had also sought an answer to the question: "What was this ancient spirit and characteristic soul of India?" (Ghosh 2011, in Bhushan and Garfield 2011: 41). However, in the second phase of his debate with Gandhi, Tagore raised a significantly different question: "What is this *swaraj*?" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008: 114). Much earlier, in the closing words of *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi had declared his life quest: "In my opinion, we have used the term 'swaraj' without understanding its real significance. I have endeavoured to explain it as I understand it, and my conscience testifies that my life henceforth is dedicated to its attainment" (Parel 2009: 117). It is important to recall Parel's argument that one of the reasons that Gandhi wrote *Hind Swaraj* (on a return journey from London to South Africa in 1909) was to respond to the politics of expatriate Indians, many of whom thought that *swaraj* was inextricably linked with a recovery of the legitimate *swa* in *swaraj*. "Gandhi's interlocutors in *Hind Swaraj* belong to two camps—those opposed to his philosophy and those in favour of it. Among those opposed, are, first, V.D. Savarkar and Shyamji Krishna Varma,… They want to transform India into a Hindu ethnic state by the use of violence, including terrorist violence" (Parel 2009: xv).

Interestingly, one can argue that Gandhi made a significant contribution to the composite sense of the term *swaraj* itself. For, though Gandhi himself often translated *swaraj* as *self* rule, in doing this he might have become a victim of the same colonial epistemic violence that he identified and criticized in other contexts. To get closer to what Gandhi meant by *swaraj*, one can recall that *swa* is part of the family of words involving "se", that is, proper or of one's own most orientation. It should be noted that when Gandhi spoke of *swaraj* he had in mind more than *self*-rule. Gandhi clearly meant to invoke a teleological conception of the properly *human* life as the life *swabhavik* to man *qua* man and not only to an Indian, a Gujarati, a Hindu, a Muslim or a Parsi. In this context, Ajay Skaria has made the point that though *swabhavik* is often translated as "natural", 'swa' is also a cognate of words involving *se*, "proper", "ownmost". *Bhav*: "orientation" (Skaria 2010: 145). One can argue that when Gandhi spoke of *swaraj* as self rule he meant to

invoke the freedom of each person to live a life that came naturally to her as a human self/subject. For Gandhi, as he declared in many places (and this is discussed in Chap. 2 of the present volume), the properly human life natural to man (or the life of man's inner most orientation) was one which progressed non-violently towards a *telos* which was "truth". It was on account of such an understanding of *swa* as coming from "se"/ownmost, that Gandhi interpreted *swaraj* in a dual sense—as self-rule and as home rule, normatively grounding the former in the latter. Such an understanding also made room for a rethinking of the collective Indian self as not a Hindu, Muslim or Christian self but as a properly human self who was free to live a *ahimsanat* life that came naturally to man *qua* man. Both Gandhi and Tagore argued that political home rule could only be grounded in individual freedom. By doing this, they also emphasized individual responsibility for securing collective freedom by reiterating the relationship between the selection of the means adopted to realize freedom and *swaraj* as the goal or end. Tagore argued that "*swaraj* alone can beget *swaraj*" (Bhattacharya 2008: 120). Gandhi, it may be recalled, had argued that means and end are inseperable.

It becomes important to note that though they agreed on relocating the debate about India to *swaraj*, the disagreements between Tagore and Gandhi were centered around on the proper meaning of that term. Gandhi had already explained what he meant by *swaraj* in *Hind Swaraj.* He had said that *swaraj* was to be understood in a dual sense—as home rule and what he called self-rule. Gandhi made it clear that home rule was dependent on individual self-rule. This was explained: "Real home rule is self-rule or self-control. The way to it is passive resistance: that is soul-force or love-force" (Parel 2009: 116). While Tagore also had a dual understanding of *swaraj*, he rejected Gandhi's understanding of it. As I argue in Chap. 5, individual freedom was understood by Tagore in terms closer to the enlightenment and to Kant. At the individual level, *swaraj* was freedom in the mind or a freedom to reason and judge for oneself rather than moral self-mastery. As home rule, *swaraj* was a complicated end which required a comprehensive programme of national reconstruction and the removal of internal obstacles such as Hindu–Muslim antagonism. Thus, though both Tagore and Gandhi saw *swaraj* as related to the self and to India, they had different understandings of what *swaraj* meant for the self and for the collective.

The importance of this debate between Gandhi and Tagore in relocating the issues at stake in the anti-colonial Indian movement can become apparent if one considers another text that was written around 1881–1882. This was *Ānandmaṭh* or *The Sacred Brotherhood*, which was written by Bankimchandra Chatterji. *Ānandmaṭh* can be properly described as primarily engaged in (what Vajpeyi has described as) the quest for the "'swa' of 'swaraj'" (Vajpeyi 2012: x). In *Ānandmaṭh*, this search was not conceived in the terms of a rethinking of the self but as a recovery of the legitimate *swa* in *swaraj* from India's ancient past. The protagonists in the story were the children/*santan*s of the 'mother' who reclaimed their true self by turning to the enduring ideal of Hindu ascetic renunciation in the service of the mother/country. As Bhabhananda put it in this novel: "We've lost our religious way of life, our caste status, our self-respect, and our family connections—and now

we're about to lose our lives! If we don't get rid of these bearded degenerates will anything be left of our Hindu identity?" (Chatterji 2005: 147). Chatterji argues (through the events in the novel) that it could only be after the Indian self had been reclaimed that it would make sense to establish *swaraj* for the sake of that self. The prioritization of the need to first recover, and then empower, the *legitimate* self of India rather than *determine* what it meant to be free becomes clear from the tactical acceptance of colonial rule by the *santan*s to overthrow Muslim dominion in India. This was construed as an opportunity to empower the legitimate Indian self by Western learning and Western science. This becomes clear at the end of *Ānandmaṭh* when the Healer comes to Satyananda Thakur after the war and says:

> For a long time now the outward knowledge has been lost in this land, and so the true Eternal code has been lost too. If one wishes to reinstate this Code, one must make known the outward knowledge first…. The English are very knowledgeable in the outward knowledge…. Therefore we'll make them king (Chatterji 2005: 229).

This understanding of the Indian movement as a search for the *swa* in *swaraj* was grounded on the concept of legitimacy. The important question was not what is the meaning of *swaraj* and what can be the legitimate means to attain it. Rather, the important question was: 'Who is the legitimate Indian?' One can note that the term *santan* invokes the mother–child relationship as a metaphor for defining the legitimate Indian. It is only those who are *born of* the mother, "The 'Mother's Children" (Chatterji *Ānandmaṭh* 2005: 146), who can claim legitimacy. The mother is a metaphor for the country and this literary argument settles legitimacy not by place of birth but by the relationship of faith with the land of birth. In *Ānandmaṭh*, the quest for *swaraj* was thought of in terms of *empowering* the reclaimed authentic Indian self. It may be noted that *reclaiming* unlike *rethinking* has the sense of "taking back" what is already one's own and has been lost. Most importantly, in *Ānandmaṭh* there is a central insight that the means to such legitimate reclamation (note the invoking of the mother-*santan* relationship as the grounds of legitimacy)—whether violence by *santan*s or tactical acceptance of British rule to drive out the Muslim empire—were unimportant, since the "end" put the means in perspective as purely instrumental.

It is important to note that the exchanges between Gandhi and Tagore reclaimed the debate about India from questions about the individual's legitimate relationship to the land of her birth to questions about *swaraj* and the proper means to *swaraj*. The significance of this shift in collective imagination cannot be overemphasized. However, though the debate was primarily centred on *swaraj*, it involved arguments about a set of related Gandhian categories. It should be noted that these arguments are important for the philosophical rethinking of central Gandhian insights. Chapter 1 of the book makes a fairly detailed summary and examination of the major issues discussed, in terms of the four historical phases of the exchanges in this debate. It can therefore be skipped by a discerning reader who is familiar with the details of that exchange. Chapter 2 makes an attempt to rethink Gandhi's fundamental moral insights. The chapter examines the philosophical implications of Gandhi's reconstruction of Patañjali's *yama*s/*niyama*s as virtues of character.

While Gandhi's engagement with the *Bhagavad Gītā* is well known, his relationship to the *Yoga Sūtra* is lesser known. There are over 200 references made by Gandhi in the Collected Works to Patañjali and the *Yoga Sūtra*. While Chap. 2 attempts to recover Gandhi's engagement with India's classical tradition, it also reinterprets Gandhi's central moral insights.

Swaraj and related categories were not the only important issues in this debate. The debate also brought out Tagore's difficulties with Gandhi's understanding of "truth". The debate between Gandhi and Tagore was about truth: Tagore wrote "The Call of Truth" (*Modern Review*) and Gandhi addressed "The Poet's Anxiety" (*Young India*, June 1921). Chapter 3 of the book is about Gandhi's truth. This chapter examines Prof. Akeel Bilgrami's interpretation of Gandhi's truth as primarily relativist. That such a discussion is philosophically important is obvious but it is especially important to the central task of this book which is to make a philosophical examination of the Gandhi Tagore debate. If Gandhi rejected objective moral truths and endorsed a Jain form of pluralism and internalism about truth (as Bilgrami thinks he did) it would be inconsistent for him (both in thinking and practice) to debate with Tagore about the truth of the central Gandhian "principles" (Gandhi himself used this term) such as *satyagraha*, non-cooperation and *charkha*.

Another way in which truth enters the debate is through a consideration of the possibilities of untruth which were present in the Gandhian methods to arrive at the truth. Chapter 4 brings out Tagore's insights about the possibilities of untruth in Gandhi's movements, while Chap. 5 points to the differences between their conflicting interpretations of *swaraj*.

As evident from this discussion, I use the word "India" in this book rather than "Indic", a term which might find more following among scholars writing about the colonial period in history. It has been argued by such scholars that the empirical analytic and ideological sense of "Indic" might work better for positing a geospatial unit about whom we speak without any reference to an entity such as a nation. If modern Indian political thought can be understood, it can perhaps only be through the problematizations of the founders of modern India. These were also the intellectuals who constructed, and intellectually contested, the primary political categories in terms of which the political was imagined. Since their varied and contesting imaginations made a political point about centring on an entity called "India", no matter how much they might have debated its *swa qua* self or questioned the legitimacy of "nation", as an appropriate category to designate "India", I prefer to retain the use of that term.

This book argues that the differences between Tagore and Gandhi's imaginings of free "India" came from their differently negotiated relationships to tradition and modernity. However, though Tagore was closer than Gandhi to the Western Enlightenment (and its central ideas) he cannot unreflectively be taken to be a modern. One reason for this is that Tagore rejected the anthropocentricism of Western modernity which puts man at the centre of the universe and dismantles the idea of a wider order. It was his rejection of the primarily modern, "anthropomorphic hallucination" (Tagore 2012: 88), of seeing man everywhere that brought

Tagore fairly close to Gandhi. For, they both shared the belief that man could be thought of only against the vastness of the cosmos: "We stand before this great world" (Tagore 1996: 511). The conclusion (Chap. 6) brings out Gandhi and Tagore's shared sense of life in an enchanted universe.

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Book Notes

The author has spelt Sanskrit words used by Gandhi and Tagore (which appear in quotations from their works) exactly as they appear in their writing. Consequently, in the interest of consistency diacritical marks have not been used for those words throughout this book. However words quoted from the *Yoga Sūtra* have been written as quoted therein i.e., with diacritical marks. It may be noted that when a word such as 'Sadhana' has been spelt 'Sādhanā' in edited works compiling Tagore's essays, and 'Sādhana' in Shyam Ranganathan's translation of the *Yoga Sūtra* (which is the translation of the *Yoga Sūtra* used in this book), the entry in the glossary reflects this dual usage. The author has simply followed the style of the original texts or of the translations which have been quoted in the book.

Chapter 1
The Tagore–Gandhi Debate: An Account of the Central Issues

> *There are times in life when the question of knowing one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all….*
>
> (Foucault 1985, p. 8).

Abstract The Tagore–Gandhi debate was the second of the trilogy of the Gandhian debates with Savarkar, Tagore and Ambedkar. This chapter argues that engagement with criticism was fairly central to Gandhi's life and thought. The chapter offers a detailed account of the major issues raised across the four phases of the exchange between Gandhi and Tagore. During this period (1915–1941), Tagore raised arguments against *satyagraha*, the non-cooperation movement, boycott of government schools, the burning of foreign cloth and Gandhi's connection between spinning and *swaraj*.

Keywords Debate · Criticism · Boycott · *Charkha* · Non-cooperation · *Mantras* · *Swaraj* · Friendship

To know that one can think differently than one does can be essential to sustain the acts of thinking and reflecting. One might ask why differences matter to one's being able to reflect on one's own. It is fairly comfortable to be in a world where everyone simply reaffirms what one thinks. Yet, the world seen and related by Lewis Carol in *Alice in Wonderland* could be fairly important to how one sees one's own world. Of course, difference is not always so easy to share or learn from as flights of fantasy. There are more difficult differences. Differences between people on how they perceive and understand things that matter to them. One can ask what could be good in being shaken out of the comfort of one's understanding of things by serious disagreement. An answer appears if one considers that without engaging with differences from one's own way of understanding reality one can never see things as they really are. For self, or largely ego-directed, visions of how one wants to see things could entirely encircle one's perceptions so as to make them progressively distanced from how things are as a matter of fact. One's way of looking outward and reflecting on what one sees can gradually lose a sense of relation with thinking

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as an activity of the mind directed away from one's inner life and thereby different from introspection. A good way of ensuring that one remains open to the possibility that things can be substantially different from how one wants/"thinks" them to be is by engaging with difference. Debate as a mode of intellectual engagement can make significantly other ways of knowing things an inherent part of one's own way of thinking and knowing. It is interesting that debate was an important part of Gandhi's life and thinking. In fact the Gandhi–Tagore debate is only one of a trilogy of three significant debates in Gandhi's life.

Gandhi's first debate was with Savarkar. This debate possibly began in October 1906 when Gandhi and Haji Ojer Ally were in London on a second deputation from South Africa and were taken by Leius Ritch to stay at the India House. (At about this time Savarkar was a resident of India House.) In 1909, Gandhi was once again in London on a deputation from South Africa and met Savarkar (on 24 October 1909) at a *dussera* dinner in Bayswater at Nazimuddin's Indian restaurant. The debate between Gandhi and Savarkar was about conflicting understandings of colonial India's past, different interpretations of the present and contesting expectations of the future. It raised conflicting understandings of Indian identity, nationalism and Hinduism.[1] Gandhi's second debate was with Tagore and it started about the time they met in Santiniketan in March 1915. This debate was primarily about the nature of individual/collective freedom and the proper means to attain such freedom. Tagore raised several issues. To him it was important that an individual retain her freedom in the negotiation of relationships to imagined pasts, presents and futures. Such relationships could demand that the individual subsume her self-identity in the *collective* religious or national identity. For Tagore, *collective* identities were deeply problematic and a source of untruth. The third Gandhian debate was with Ambedkar in the 1920s. It was a debate about conflicting interpretations of caste and *varna* and of the proper means to eradicate untouchability and secure justice for the depressed classes.

In a sense all the three debates were about different issues: Indian identity/the collective self of India, freedom, and, questions of justice and *Dalit* identity. Yet, they can be interpreted as having shared an underlying tension. This can be spelt out as a tension about how the colonial Indian mind was to negotiate a relationship between tradition and modernity. What was common to the position of the three "others" in these debates was that (no matter their very different positions on tradition) they were comfortable with central ideas of Western modernity. While Savarkar was a revivalist and a supporter of tradition, he was not opposed to modernity. Savarkar made a significant distinction between specifically religious and the social-cultural aspects of the Indian/Hindu tradition. In his view, while it was necessary to reclaim the cultural and social identity of the individual or collective Indian self, the Hindu *rashtra* could be remodelled along the lines suggested by Western modernity. On this view, there was no antagonism between Indian/Hindu nationalism and the ways of life defined by the technological advancements

[1] For a detailed discussion, see Puri (2001).

of modern science. This argument perhaps made it possible for Savarkar to accept modern forms of political violence as the proper means for collective Indian freedom. Moving to the second Gandhian debate, Tagore reconstructed *swaraj*/freedom primarily (in terms fairly close to the Enlightenment and to Kant) as the individual's freedom to reason. Of the three "others" in the debates it was Tagore who emphasized the importance of a critical interrogation of the fundamental categories of modernity. Yet, Tagore's intellectual affinity to the central ideas of the Enlightenment brought him fairly close to modern self-consciousness. The third interrogator, Ambedkar, was comfortable with the conceptual categories suggested by modernity. In his debate with Gandhi, Ambedkar used the language of majority/minority, federalism, democracy and rights—civil and socio-economic. In particular, Ambedkar *chose* not to turn to the Indian traditions for intellectual resources. In these, he located the powerful axis of subordination of the depressed classes. He recommended that any attempt for securing justice for the depressed classes ought to be *disengaged* from substantive appeals to the religious values of the Hindus.

The one significant difference between Gandhi and the three protagonists was that unlike his interrogators Gandhi did not share in the imagination of a future for India, which looked to modernity for categories to negotiate its new present.

It is significant that Gandhi came the closest to sharing conceptual space with Tagore. Though Tagore was not a traditionalist he retained a living relationship to India's past through the Bengali language. Tagore and his family were an important part of the Bengali renaissance (which began around 1890 and ended in the 1940s). Furthermore, despite the intellectual affinity with the Enlightenment and its central ideas, Tagore could not be uncritically called a modern. He insisted on individual freedom in the mind while interrogating both tradition *and* modernity. In this connection, one can take note of his criticism of the modern Western "nation state". Tagore's relationship to (and understanding of) nature is also significant, for this put him at some intellectual distance from the anthropocentricism of modernity. It is hoped that this book (which is about the second of the three Gandhian debates) will be able to bring out the shared spaces between Gandhi and Tagore with some clarity.

On reflection it may appear evident that debate itself was somewhat central to Gandhi's life and thought. Given the contemporary context this may seem a little strange as Gandhi was actively involved with colonial Indian politics. The centrality of Gandhi's desire to grapple with intellectual differences in forming his own ideas, as sort of preparatory to his political activism, could indicate something fairly important about the pattern of his thought. It reveals that though Gandhi was not a professional philosopher there was a philosophical vision, which underlay his life of reflection, intellectual exchange and political engagement.

One can argue that the acceptance of the need to engage with differences, which underlies debate as a form of conceptual exchange, presupposes a humility in the engaging mind. To debate involves an intellectual welcome to an opposition in ideas. The manner of that welcome is structured in a form, which is hospitable to learning. Such intellectual hospitality to difference in ideas as an opportunity to learn suggests a diminutive presence of the ego in the life of the mind. However, it is in ideas that the ego could seem at its strongest. For one is most stubbornly attached to how one

understands things—to one's own vision of what constitutes the best form of life in general or perhaps of political life. This is evidence of the strange dichotomy of the human condition. It is most restricted where it most needs to be free. For it seems essential that if the mind is to grow, it must learn. Learning implies (at the very least) a freedom from egoism in ideas. Yet, it is in the mind that one may feel most restricted by egoistic preoccupations with the self. One can recall that schools of Indian philosophy (Patañjali, for instance, in the *Yoga Sūtra*) thought of the mind as the seat of the sense of *asmitā*/ego. That Gandhi welcomed debates and was so willing to learn from opposing ideas (while putting forth his own), offers evidence of an *ahimsa* that was even more basic than has been understood. Gandhian non-violence as an egolessness and humility had a foundation in the inner life or the life of the mind. It could be argued that the centrality of debate in Gandhi points to the fact that Gandhian *ahimsa* started at a fundamental level with the diminution of the "I" in the mind.

Having located the Tagore–Gandhi debate in the trilogy of the Gandhian debates, it would be appropriate to turn attention to that debate, which is the subject of the present volume.

1.1 A Brief Chronology of Events

In their relationship from 1915 to 1941, Tagore (1861–1941) and Gandhi (1869–1948) differed and argued about many things. Gandhi met Tagore for the first time when he came to Santiniketan in March 1915. Though they met in person at that time they had known each other before they met. Tagore had information about Gandhi's contributions in South Africa through his friend C.F. Andrews and W.W. Pearson, one of his colleagues at Santiniketan. When Gandhi was still in South Africa a meeting had been held at the Town Hall in Calcutta (on 5 December 1913) to discuss the position of Indians in South Africa. Tagore had presided over that meeting. Andrews wrote to Tagore frequently from South Africa and consequently Tagore was well acquainted with Gandhi's activities. Gandhi had also met Tagore's older brother Jyotindranath in Calcutta on an earlier visit to India. "It is on record that in 1901 at the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress, M.K. Gandhi moved a resolution as a petitioner on behalf of the hundred thousand British Indians in South Africa" (Bhattacharya 2008, p. 3). After this meeting with Jyotindranath Tagore, a translation of Gandhi's articles on the Indian settlers in South Africa was published in *Bharati,* which was a journal closely associated with the Tagore family.

In a friendship that spanned 26 years, Tagore and Gandhi argued on many things of personal, national and international significance. The tenor of the differences between them may be read off their very first meeting. This meeting has inspired artists and writers alike. The meeting between C.F. Andrews, Tagore and Gandhi in 1915 has been portrayed in the mural at Birla House in New Delhi (painted in 1973 by Ram Kirpal Singh). The mural retrospectively depicts the key episodes of Gandhi's life. The meeting was also described by Gandhi's biographer Shankar Bose in the following words:

> …Gandhi, the lone, ascetic man of action, went to *Santiniketan* to meet Tagore, the poet-philosopher who looked stately in his flowing beard and gown. This meeting between the two men, both so firmly rooted in Indian culture, was a picture in contrast and they discussed many matters including Gandhi's favourite subject of dietics. Gandhi maintained that for making *puris* good grains were converted into poison by frying the same in ghee or oil. Tagore, the lover of art and life, said that he had been eating *puris* all his life and they did him no harm (Bose 1991 quoted in Puri 2001, p. 130).

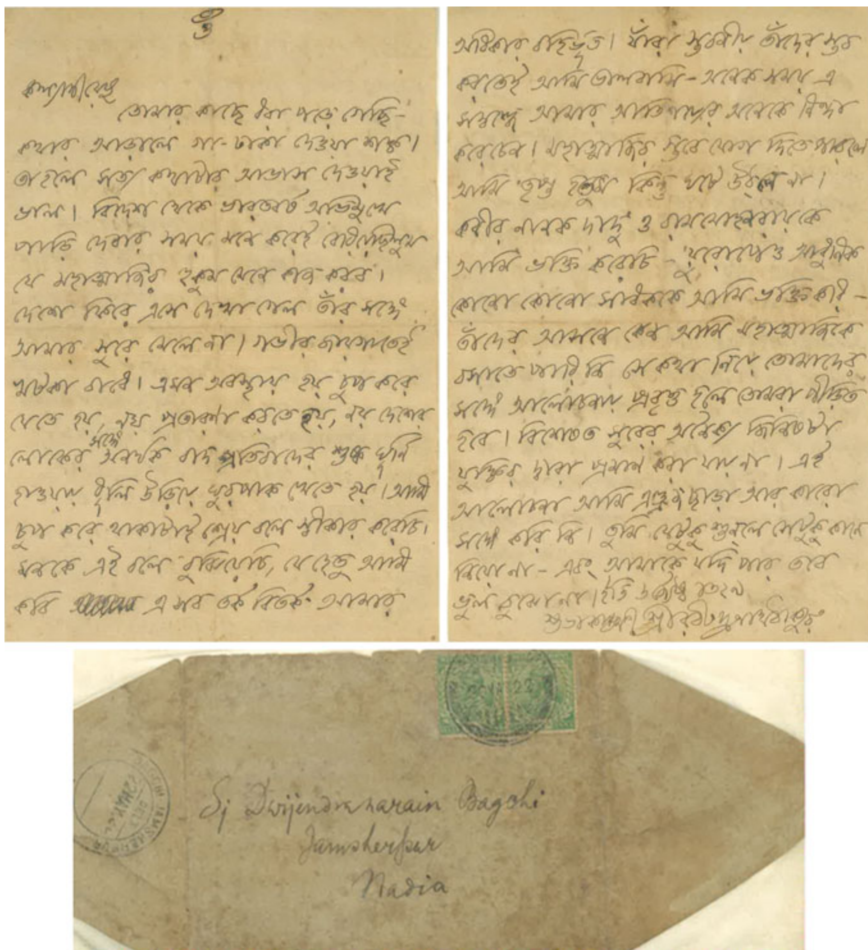
Be it *puri*s or matters of more consequence, Tagore insisted upon the freedom to differ.

A series of articles written by both of them appeared in *Modern Review* and in *Young India* debating the questions raised by Tagore. Tagore's early criticism appeared in 1921 in the form of some letters to Andrews. These were published in *Modern Review* (May 1921). Gandhi replied with two articles in *Young India* (June 1921). This was followed by a rejoinder from Tagore entitled "The Call of Truth" (first published in *Prabasi* in Bengali and later in *Modern Review*). Gandhi responded with the essay "The Great Sentinel" (*Young India*, 13 October 1921) preceded by shorter essays. At this stage, the debate centred on three issues: *satyagraha*, non-cooperation, and the boycott and burning of foreign cloth. In 1922, Tagore wrote a letter to a friend, Shri Dwijendra Narain Bagchi (who was a staunch supporter of Gandhi) about his differences with Gandhi (see Fig. 1.1). He wrote: "On the way back from my trip abroad, I had more or less made up my mind that I would work under the orders of Mahatmaji. On my return to India I realized that I was not in agreement with him. I had doubts about the very core of his reasoning".[2] With a short break the debate recommenced in 1925 with Tagore's essay, "The Cult of the Charkha". This was followed by another essay, "Striving for *Swaraj*". This was in the September 1925 issue of *Modern Review*. Gandhi also responded with two essays, "The Poet and the *Charkha*" and "The Poet and the Wheel" in *Young India*. There was another spate of letters between them in the early 1930s concerning the efficacy of fasting as a means of resistance. In 1934, the Bihar earthquake once again brought Tagore (given his insistence on the need for individual freedom of the mind) into conflict with Gandhi. In February 1937, Tagore requested Gandhi to be a life trustee of Visva-Bharati. Gandhi last visited Santiniketan in 1940 and Tagore died on 7 August 1941.

1.1.1 An Account of the Central Issues

The debate between Tagore and Gandhi took place across letters (sometimes even telegrams) exchanged between them, letters written by Tagore to Andrews and

[2] The postmark on the envelope says 22 May 1922. This letter is unpublished and in the private collection of Mrs Nandita Roy, grand daughter of Shri Bagchi. It has been printed with an English translation for the first time in this volume.



Sj Dwijendranarain Bagchi
Jamsherpur
Nadia

Fig. 1.1 Letter from Tagore to Dwijendra Narain Bagchi, 1922. *Source* Private collection of Mrs. Nandita Roy, reproduced here with permission

Blessings, dear friend.

You have caught me out: it is difficult to take cover under words. It is better, then, to give you an idea of the truth.

On the way back from my trip abroad, I had more or less made up my mind that I would work under the orders of Mahatmaji. On my return to India I realized that I was not in agreement with him. I had doubts about the very core of his reasoning. In such a situation, one has to either remain silent, or not be true to one's convictions, or enter into an endless maelstrom of debate with the people of one's own country. I prefer to remain silent, and have tried to convince myself that as a poet it is beyond my right to be part of such debates.

I love to revere those who are venerable, and some have criticized me as being too exuberant in this regard. It would have been a pleasure for me to join in singing paeans for Mahatmaji, but that was not to be. I respect Kabir, Nanak, Dadu and Rammohun Roy*---and have great regard for some of the modern thinkers of Europe---but I will cause you[†] unnecessary pain if I enter into a discussion with you on why I cannot place Mahatmaji on the same pedestal. Disharmony in sentiment, in particular, cannot be explained rationally. I have not shared these thoughts with anyone else but Andrews.** Do not pay heed to what little I have told you here and try not to misunderstand me.

Wishing you well,

Yours,

Rabindranath Tagore

Note Translation from Bengali by Mrs. Nandita Roy
*Nanak (1469–1539), was the founder of Sikhism; Kabir (1440–1518) was a mystic poet-saint whose work influenced both the Bhakti and Sufi movements; Rammohun Roy (1772–1833) was the founder of the monotheistic Brahmo movement for religious reform; Dadu (1544–1603) was a poet-saint from Rajasthan
[†] Tagore uses 'you' in the plural here
**Charles Freer Andrews (1871–1940) was ordained as an Anglican priest in 1897. He renounced his priesthood in 1914 Andrews was a close associate and friend of both Tagore and Gandhi

Fig. 1.1 (continued)

essays written by both of them addressing issues raised by either party. However, they remained friends often seeking each other's advice and help. Keeping both the issues and the historical periods of the exchanges in mind a fairly useful way to locate this debate seems to be in terms of the chronological framework of four different phases. The framework suggested by Bhattacharya (2008) divides the exchange into four periods: 1915–1922; 1923–1928; 1929–1933; and 1934–1941.

In writing this book, I had to choose between two possible ways of giving an account of the debate between Gandhi and Tagore. One was to make a fairly detailed summary and examination of the major issues discussed by them in terms of the four phases of their exchange. The other was to bring out the fundamental philosophical divergences, which underlay these exchanges. Having chosen the latter model, it is appropriate to make a brief overview of the major issues raised between them in this introductory chapter.

1.2 The Four Phases of the Tagore–Gandhi Exchange

1.2.1 The First Phase (1915–1922)

As noted above, the differences between Gandhi and Tagore were raised across four different periods. The first phase (1915–1922) of the exchange was related to the non-cooperation movement (1920–1921) headed by Gandhi. Tagore expressed deep reservations about Gandhi's methods of resistance in letters to Andrews, in essays in national dailies and in private correspondence. Tagore's difficulties with the non-cooperation movement can be briefly put together as follows:

1. Tagore argued that politicians had taken an instrumentalist view of Gandhi's conception of collective action as *satyagraha.* In his view, Indian politicians had converted Gandhi's message into a mindless *mantra*. This had served to detract from *swaraj*/freedom as it had strengthened the widespread tendency to inertness and inertia in Indian minds.
2. Tagore raised specific arguments against the form of non-cooperation as a boycott of government schools, especially as there was no alternative system of education available in colonial India.
3. Tagore was equally disturbed about the other form that the Gandhian non-cooperation movement had assumed—that of the boycott and burning of foreign cloth. He was sceptical about the economic merits of an exclusive preoccupation with handicrafts and the *charkha*.
4. Tagore questioned the conception of Gandhian resistance in the form of a "non-cooperation" movement. He also rejected Gandhi's idealization of the personhood of the *satyagrahi*. He argued that this was an idealization of a purely negative conception of the self as a non-cooperator. Such a self had a tendency to emphasize rejection and a related tendency to concentrate on the defects of "others". The non-cooperator, therefore, failed to give due attention to the shared shortcomings of colonial Indians as a people. Tagore also noted an obscurantist isolationism in this movement. This was a consequence of the fact that it failed to take a broader view of humanity.

It may be useful to discuss these four points in some detail, followed by Gandhi's responses to them.

Firstly, Tagore was sceptical of the manner in which the masses had adopted Gandhian *satyagraha*. Tagore was critical of collectives and collective movements as being against the individual's freedom to reason. In the same spirit he argued (in a letter to Gandhi in 1919) that: "Passive resistance is a force which is not necessarily moral in itself; it can be used against truth as well as for it" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 49). He argued that the Indian politicians had converted voluntary participation in *satyagraha* into a sort of mass and "oppressive compulsion" (Tagore, "The Call of Truth", in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 78). What was worse was that such compulsion had been generated as the result of a "stratagem in politics" (p. 77). This form of tactical compulsion imposed on the masses was not

only in itself a “barren policy”, but also induced the masses to surrender their individual freedom to reason in order “to cling to an unquestioning obedience.… To some *mantra*, some unreasoned creed” (p. 78). Tagore was clear that freedom would not be achieved if the means adopted to attain freedom were contrary to the individual’s freedom in the mind. He cautioned Indians:

> Having had such a clear vision of this wonderful power of Truth, are we to cease to believe in it, just where the attainment of *swaraj is* concerned? Has the Truth, which was needed in the process of awakenment to be got rid of in the process of achievement? (p. 80)

The second set of arguments concerned the form of Gandhian non-cooperation as the boycott of government schools. Tagore argued firstly that the idea of such boycott was a form of “political asceticism” (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 57). For the students were sacrificing government education for “non-education”. This programme seemed to him to celebrate a “a fierce joy of annihilation which at best is asceticism” and at worst is an “orgy of frightfulness”, which leads to a denial of “the basic reality of normal life” (p. 57). The problem with such political asceticism was that it was against the true spirit of human nature. According to Tagore, human nature consisted (at its best) not in the denial of the physical body and its needs, but in the “establishment of harmony between the physical and spiritual nature of man” (p. 59). Secondly, Tagore argued that the boycott was “a mere negative programme”, which resulted in an “anarchy of … emptiness”. It took on itself the “tremendous responsibility” for the ordinary lives of the students without making any provision for an alternative system of education, thereby doing them a “great injury and injustice”, which could really “never be made good to them” (p. 58). The fact that all this was being done “from the point of view of an abstraction” (p. 58), whether conceived as a nation state or as home rule, could not make good the fact that individual lives had been uprooted. The third argument was against the tendency of the Gandhian boycott to completely and (on this view) misguidedly devalue Western education. To Tagore, an individual’s basic and shared humanity demanded that he/she should be able to acknowledge the intellectual “glories” of “other countries” (p. 62) as his/her own. There was a grave error in the idea of dissociation from the education that the West was imparting. As Tagore argued, the “…present age has powerfully been possessed by the west.… We from the East have come to her to learn whatever she has to teach us; for by doing so we hasten the fulfillment of this age” (p. 62). Fourthly, India in particular could especially benefit from Western education. This was because the stress on science in Western education could make human beings free from the spell of magic and thereby enable them to understand the physical universe as it really was. Elsewhere (in “*Sikshar Milan*”), Tagore had argued that “…to condemn the sort of learning which has made the West the monarch of Nature will be a great crime” (Sen et al. 1961, p. 665). He argued that Indians had been content with surrendering their “greatest right—the right to reason and to judge” to the blind forces of *shastric* injunctions and social conventions (Tagore, “The Call of Truth”, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 76). In Tagore’s view, Indians could not ignore the role of Western education as a means to encourage freedom and overcome an “inertness of mind, which is the basis of all slavery” (p. 76).

The next point Tagore raised about the non-cooperation movement had to do with the discarding and burning of foreign cloth. In this context, he criticized Gandhi's exclusive preoccupation with handicrafts and the stress on spinning as the immediate means to *swaraj*/freedom. Tagore had been an ardent supporter of *swadeshi* in 1905. As he noted, he had "given a thousand rupees to open a *swadeshi* store and courted banter and bankruptcy" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 58). Yet, he argued that the Gandhian equation of spinning with freedom was like dangling a "bait" to incite the greed of people. The masses responded in an unthinking way, for there seemed a possibility "of getting a thing of inestimable value dirt cheap and in double-quick time" (Tagore, "The Call of Truth" 2008, p. 78). Further, to Tagore the boycott and burning of foreign cloth was against individual freedom. People who failed to be lured were being compelled to participate in the movement, with the result that there was "an oppressive atmosphere" burdening the land. Tagore argued that such compulsion could at times even become threatening. He recorded that a newspaper editor who had the "temerity to disapprove … of the burning of foreign cloth … was shaken out of his balance by the agitation of his readers". It seemed to him that the Gandhian boycott and burning had become yet another "*mantra*" requiring "unquestioning obedience" (p. 78). This meant that individual freedom to respond to reason and to judge for oneself was being overpowered by an "outside compulsion" in the name of collective freedom as independence. For Tagore, this was a contradiction in terms, as such an encouragement of an inertness of mind could only perpetuate slavery. With such means, *swaraj* as an end would only effect a change of masters and not true individual freedom. If boycott and burning of foreign cloth were inimical to the individual's freedom to reason, the condemnation of foreign cloth as "impure" was a confusion of economics with morality. Tagore argued that it was a confusion of two sorts of discourse to bring moral judgements to bear on economic evaluations: "If the country has really come to such a habit of mind that precise thinking has become impossible for it, then our very first fight should be against such a fatal habit… . " In this context, Tagore argued that the wearing of foreign cloth could only be considered as "an offence against economics, hygiene, or aesthetics but not against morality" (p. 83).

Though the detailed arguments against spinning belonged to the second phase, Tagore had argued against the condemnation of foreign products and the advocacy of the *charkha*, during the first phase of his debate with Gandhi. The Gandhian argument was that non-cooperation with foreign cloth was required to establish economic self-sufficiency and alleviate poverty. According to this view, poverty was caused (in large part) by imports of foreign cloth and consequent neglect of the Indian handicraft industry. Tagore countered this by saying that the causes of poverty were more complex and that the ruination of handicrafts could only be considered as an external symptom of the process of impoverishment. Consequently, a programme, which focused exclusively on handicrafts, could not be sufficient to alleviate India's poverty. It would be appropriate (according to this view) to take a more comprehensive view of the problem and think in terms of a cooperative movement at the rural level. Further, Tagore had problems with spinning itself. For one, he argued that Gandhi's identification of the call of truth with the command to spin negated the possibility of

other paths to truth. In the context of "building up *swaraj*", Tagore said that "the mind of the country must exert itself in all directions" (Tagore, "The Call of Truth", in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 80). Secondly, spinning though good "in its proper place" might be positively harmful if "it is in the wrong place" (p. 82). Failure to acknowledge differences between individual temperaments by an unequivocal insistence on the *charkha* might lead to "the cost of a great deal of the mind itself" (p. 82). Thirdly, the idea that spinning alone could lead the country to *swaraj* appeared to Tagore to be mistaken. *Swaraj* "…cannot be established on cheap clothing; its foundation is in the mind, which with its diverse powers and its confidence in those powers goes on all the time creating *swaraj* for itself". Lastly, the argument that "…*swaraj* can be brought about by everyone engaging for a time in spinning…" was an unthinking *mantra*. Tagore argued that to thus accept "fate's oracles from human lips" (p. 82) would increase slavery rather than promote freedom.

The last argument against the Gandhian movement was against the character of the non-cooperation movement. Tagore argued that the conception of resistance as non-cooperation revealed a "passion for rejection" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 56) rather than the acceptance of any positive "ideal". He said that India should move closer towards the fundamental truth of the universe which was the ideal of "harmony and cooperation between the different peoples of the earth!" (2008, p. 60). According to Tagore, the non-cooperation movement was misguided, in itself, for India ought to be in tune with the fundamental truth of the universe, which was unity rather than the "consciousness of separateness". Tagore argued: "Let India stand for the *cooperation* of all peoples of the world" (2008, p. 61). This argument was part of Tagore's general opposition to the idea of the nation state built up on "the egoism of the people". He felt that the non-cooperation movement reinforced such collective egoism and led to an alienation from the rest of the world and was, therefore, "an attempt at spiritual suicide" (2008, p. 61).

Gandhi responded to Tagore on these four sets of arguments in three essays: "English learning" (June 1921), "The Poet's Anxiety" (June 1921) and "The Great Sentinel" (October 1921). He welcomed Tagore's criticism as useful to the movement in terms of serving as a moment of national introspection. He said that the poet "deserves the thanks of his countrymen for standing up for Truth and Reason" (Gandhi, "The Great Sentinel", in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 87). However, this did not mean that he accepted the charges against the movement as justified. Gandhi replied to Tagore with the following sets of arguments:

1. Arguments defending the non-cooperation movement and Indian nationalism from the charges of being negative, exclusionist, aggressive and isolationist.
2. Arguments defending the boycott of government schools from the charge that such boycott implied a rejection of English learning. Gandhi defended the boycott by criticizing the system of education provided by the government schools.
3. Arguments in support of the burning and boycott of foreign cloth and the advocacy of *swadeshi*.
4. Arguments in support of spinning and the *charkha*.

To begin with, the charge that the character of the non-cooperation movement was that of "a doctrine of separation, exclusiveness, narrowness and negation" (Gandhi, "The Poet's Anxiety", in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 65–68). Gandhi argued that far from seeking to erect a wall of separation between India and the West the movement was intended "to pave the way to real, honourable and voluntary cooperation based on mutual respect and trust" (p. 65). He argued that for genuine cooperation there had to be a rejection of "compulsory co-operation" (p. 66), which had been imposed by the colonial government. Such rejection took the form of a "deliberate refusal to co-operate" (p. 67), and this was a necessary stage somewhat like a "weeding process that a cultivator has to resort to before he sows" (p. 67). Being a prelude to real cooperation, non-cooperation was not negative or narrow in spirit. Rejection or negation was necessary before the acceptance of any ideal. In any case, rejection and acceptance were correlated. Gandhi said that "rejection is as much an ideal as the acceptance of a thing. It is as necessary to reject untruth as it is to accept truth" (Gandhi, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 67). Since the ultimate end of non-cooperation was to make for the possibilities of genuine and equal respect between India and the West, it could not be classified as merely negative or isolationist in its approach. Gandhi made it clear that his movement for non-cooperation kept the possibilities of interaction open by making a crucial distinction between individuals and systems. For him it was important to take note of the fact that such "… Non-cooperation is neither with the English nor with the West. Our Non-cooperation is with the system the English have established, with the material civilization and its attendant greed and exploitation of the weak" (Gandhi, "The Great Sentinel", in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 91). Gandhi countered Tagore's criticism that the non-cooperation movement for home rule was based upon the collective egoism of the people. He said that "Indian nationalism" was not "exclusive, nor aggressive, nor destructive". On the contrary, it was "health giving, religious and therefore Humanitarian" (p. 91).

With respect to the boycott of government-sponsored education, Gandhi argued that the poet had misread the spirit of non-cooperation in regarding the movement as a rejection of the intellectual achievements of the West and as a rejection of English learning per se. He said that he was happy for young Indian men and women with "literary tastes" (Gandhi, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 64) to learn English and other world languages. His objections were along different lines. He objected to the use of Western education as a means of learning English purely for "commercial and so-called political value" (p. 63). He objected to the exclusive stress on English as having an elitist value at the cost of the Indian vernaculars as this led Indians to "forget, neglect or be ashamed of their mother tongue" (p. 64). Gandhi also defended the boycott of government-sponsored education on the grounds that the literary training that such schools imparted could not help in the task of character building. In addition, all that the government-sponsored education accomplished by way of literary training was to train Indians to become "clerks and interpreters" (Gandhi, "The Poet's Anxiety", in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 66). Gandhi argued that as the colonial government was an "evil", it had become "sinful" for Indians to associate children with it by sending them to government-sponsored schools.

Tagore had argued that to look upon foreign cloth as "impure" (Tagore, "The Call of Truth", in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 83) was to confuse economics with morality. Unlike Tagore, Gandhi considered it a "sin" (Gandhi, "The Great Sentinel", in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 90) to wear foreign cloth as it deprived Indians of food and work. For Gandhi, *khadi* became a metaphor of the identification of the ordinary Indian with the poorest of the poor. In this context, he defended the role of moral evaluation and the use of moral arguments in economics. Gandhi argued that he made no distinction between economics and ethics: "Economics that hurt the moral well-being of a nation are immoral and therefore sinful" (p. 90). In this view, it was sinful to import wheat when one's neighbours starved for "want of custom" (p. 90). This meant that it was morally wrong to accept economic policies that hurt the material well-being of one's countrymen. Having realized that moral wrong-doing is involved in the individual acceptance of economic policies that are unjust, Gandhi declared: "In burning my foreign clothes I burn my shame" (p. 90). Gandhi believed that all Indians had a moral duty to replace foreign cloth with *khadi*. Since all Indians might not easily take to spinning, it became incumbent for every Indian who understood this close connection between morality and economics, to spin. This, for Gandhi, generated a moral principle which made spinning obligatory. The use of the word "principle" here should be understood somewhat in terms of Kant's definition of a maxim, i.e. as a subjective principle of action. Except that, for Gandhi, such maxims were not subjective but contextual. (The place of moral convictions and maxims in Gandhi is discussed in Chap. 3 of this book.) In this view spinning was a moral maxim obligatory *for all Indians* in colonial India. The same argument could be extended more comprehensively towards *swadeshi* or the use of things produced in one's immediate neighbourhood. Gandhi argued that *swadeshi* was not an exclusive doctrine. He (like Tagore) wanted India to share her resources with the world. However, he understood that before one can think of "sharing with the world", one "must possess" (p. 91).

An important defence concerned spinning. Gandhi took up Tagore's charges that his moral rule making spinning obligatory was a *mantra*, which imposed an unthinking obedience on the masses. He argued that "… if happily the country has come to believe in the spinning wheel as the giver of plenty, it has done so after laborious thinking, after great hesitation". Gandhi was clear that the *charkha* had been accepted by Indians from "reasoned necessity" (Gandhi, "The Great Sentinel", in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 88). The central argument in support of the *charkha* was economic: "The human bird under the Indian sky gets up weaker than when he pretended to retire. For millions it is an eternal vigil or an eternal trance" (p. 91). Since the majority of Indians lived in villages they were not involved in bringing in any money from other countries. They went hungry for want of work. For Gandhi, "Hunger is the argument that is driving India to the spinning wheel" (p. 89). Of course, Gandhi recognized that this argument may not seem to apply to those who had no immediate need to engage in physical work for food. Gandhi argued that such people were "eating what did not belong" (p. 89) to them. He found support for the argument that physical labour was obligatory for every human being from the verses concerning *yajna*/sacrifice in (Verses 8–16 of Chap. 3 of) the *Bhagavad Gītā*.

He quoted these verses in "The Great Sentinel" in support of spinning as a form of sacrifice/*yajna*, or bread labour. He also argued that spinning ensured a respect for "the dignity of labour" (p. 89) as it was obligatory for the rich and the poor alike.

The philosophical availability of Gandhi's fundamental moral insights and arguments is clear from this discussion of the first phase of the debate. For instance, Gandhi's use of "sin" in connection with foreign cloth and the idea that burning such cloth was burning one's shame were metaphors used to indicate the urgent need for the moral regeneration of better-off Indians. On this view, Indians who wore expensive imported cloth endorsed an ego-driven differentiation between two classes—better-off and poorer Indians. To commit such a sin of differentiating oneself from those who could not afford to wear what one did, was to be established in a life of untruth. For this act, in itself, involved a failure to overcome self-directed visions that obstructed an understanding of the others' acute poverty. This also involved the denial of those who were well-off to assume moral responsibility for the acute poverty of their neighbours. *Khadi* became a symbol of *ahimsa*, or love. It indicated a sense of shared personhood and solidarity/empathetic identification between India's millions.

1.2.2 The Second Phase (1923–1928)

Gandhi was arrested on 10 March 1922 and released in February 1924. During this period, Tagore suspended all his arguments. On Gandhi's release, he sent a telegram with the welcoming words: "We Rejoice" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 95). This was followed by a letter promising to send C.F. Andrews to meet Gandhi at Pune. The debate resumed in 1925 when Tagore published an article in the Bengali journal *Sabuj Patra*. This article was translated and published in *Modern Review* (September 1925) under the title "The Cult of the Charkha". This was followed by "*Samaj Sadhan*" in *Sabuj Patra*, which reappeared in *Modern Review* under the title "Striving for *Swaraj*". Gandhi replied with two essays in *Young India*: "The Poet and the *Charkha*" (November 1925), and "The Poet and the Wheel" (March 1926). Gandhi's reference (in his essays) to Tagore as "Sir Rabindranath" and to "jealousy" (Gandhi, "The Poet and the *Charkha*", in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 122) created some disturbances. However, Gandhi clarified matters to Bidhu shekhar Shastry[3] who was part of the faculty at Santiniketan.

[3] Bidhu shekhar Shastry (1878–1957): Sanskrit scholar and Indologist, was born at Harishchandrapur, Malda in West Bengal. He studied at a Tol, obtaining the degree of Kavyatirtha when he was 17-years old. He was fluent in Sanskrit and wrote both prose and poetry in the language. He spent several years in Benares studying the scriptures and was awarded the title of Shastri. Bidhu shekhar joined Brahmacharya Vidyalaya at Shantiniketan as a professor of Sanskrit. After this he joined the department of Sanskrit at Calcutta University. The Government of India honoured him with the title of Mahamahopadhyaya in 1936. He was awarded a D.Litt. and the title of Deshikottama (1957) by the universities of Calcutta and Visva-Bharati respectively.

One could say that the friendship between Tagore and Gandhi endured the disagreements between them.

The second phase of the debate was preoccupied with Tagore's difficulties with the Gandhian connection between spinning and the attainment of *swaraj*. Tagore found the Gandhian principle "Let them spin" (Tagore, "Striving for *Swaraj*", in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 115) disturbing. He argued that Gandhi's idea that "*swaraj* can be attained by the *charkha*" (Tagore, "The Cult of the Charkha", in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 109) was in the nature of a moral principle or a "*mantram*" (p. 101). Such a *mantra* demanded "blind acceptance" (p. 100). Tagore had problems with both the Gandhian formulation of moral principles/rules and with the related idea that obedience to such rules was the means to the individual's freedom/*swaraj*. Tagore rejected the first part of Gandhi's dual understanding of *swaraj* as primarily self-rule or moral self-mastery. For Gandhi, individual *swaraj* was primarily moral self-rule, understood as the development of a form of non-egoistic personhood driven by the search for truth through an engagement with a life of virtue. The second sense of *swaraj* (in Gandhi) was home rule. The Gandhian conception of *swaraj* as moral self-rule/home rule seemed to Tagore to involve a blind obedience to *mantras*/rules. Tagore rejected unthinking individual obedience (and mass unthinking obedience) as being against both individual and collective freedom. Tagore's arguments in the second phase of the debate were primarily concerned with the Gandhian principle of spinning for *swaraj* but they were also directed against other Gandhian claims in support of spinning.

Before making a brief summary of Tagore's main arguments in this phase of the exchange, it is useful to note that as Gandhi had a dual understanding of *swaraj* as both self-rule and home rule one can argue that he understood the connection between spinning and *swaraj* at two levels. Firstly, Gandhi interpreted the individual act of spinning as part of a cultivation of the disposition to do one's share of physical work as a human being, and therefore as an expression of what he termed the virtue of bread labour. It may be worthwhile to anticipate the next chapter by noting that Gandhi had expanded the list of *vrata*s/virtues codified in the ancient texts of Jainism and Yoga, by adding five more *niyama*s or casual virtues. Gandhi had added five virtues to the five primary virtues/*yama*s traditionally formulated in Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra*: "…the five have been expanded into eleven…. They are non-violence, truth, non-stealing, brahmacharya, non-possession, bread labour, control of the palate, fearlessness, equal regard for all religions, *swadeshi* and removal of untouchability" (Gandhi 1947, vol. 95, p. 190).[4] Spinning as a form of bread labour had a place in Gandhi's expanded list of casual virtues/*niyama*s. Therefore, spinning was the object of a moral rule, obedience to which, was a part of the discipline required for individual *swaraj* as moral self-rule.

[4] Between the *Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)* (100 Volumes, 1955) and the electronic edition (*eCWMG*) are disputed differences of content and different volumes and page numbers. This refers to the electronic edition.

At another level Gandhi connected spinning to the shared quest of the *collective* Indian *swa* or self for *swaraj* as home rule. In this context, Gandhi believed that spinning alone could create a sense of *shared* purpose between India's disparate millions and could thereby play a role in the reconstruction of the collective Indian self. Spinning had a role in forging political unity essential for the independence of the nation as *swarajya/*home rule. Tagore's arguments seem to have been directed against both levels of Gandhi's understanding of this connection. Though Tagore also had a dual understanding of *swaraj* (as both individual and collective freedom) his understanding of that notion was different from Gandhi's. It was during the second phase of the debate that Tagore explicitly asked the question, "What is this *swaraj*?" (Tagore, "Striving for *Swaraj*", in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 114) The answer seemed to be that *swaraj* was related to the self and thereafter to the country. At the individual level *swaraj* was a freedom in the mind or a freedom to reason and judge for oneself rather than moral self-rule. As home rule *swaraj* was a complicated end, which required that the mind of the country freely engage in a comprehensive programme of national reconstruction through the removal of internal obstacles such as the Hindu–Muslim animosity. Though both Tagore and Gandhi saw *swaraj* as related to the *swa qua* individual/collective Indian self they had different understandings of what *swaraj* meant for that self and for India. It was perhaps his very different understanding of *swaraj* that provoked Tagore to direct various arguments against Gandhi's connection of *swaraj* with spinning.

1.2.2.1 Tagore's Arguments Against Spinning

The first set of arguments being considered here criticized the Gandhian equation of spinning with *swaraj.* There were a number of arguments made by Tagore across the two essays in this phase of the debate.

1. To begin with Tagore argued that to make spinning the object of a moral rule binding on all Indians (irrespective of differences between their temperaments) was against the fundamental truth of the universe. The divine purpose of creation was a "wealth of diversity". Tagore argued that "It is God's purpose that in the societies of man the various should be strung together into a garland of unity. While often the mortal providence of public life, greedy for particular results, seeks to kneed them all into a lump of uniformity" (Tagore, "The Cult of the Charkha", in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 99).
2. The unconditional insistence on spinning and its equation with *swaraj*/freedom went against the individual's freedom to reason and to judge for himself. It was an "ominous process" of levelling down men "into sameness" (p. 100). Tagore believed that this was against *swaraj* because home rule could only be established on the basis of the individual's freedom to reason. Tagore said clearly: "… if all over minds refuse incessantly to reverberate some one set *mantram* .…. let no one be annoyed or alarmed; for only because of this does the attainment of *swaraj* become thinkable!" (p. 101).

3. A third argument against the Gandhian connection between *swaraj* and *charkha* came from the mass character of such a levelling down of men into sameness. Tagore argued that the mass character of the obedience demanded by the spinning *mantra* was "a catastrophic phenomenon" which stunned "the rational mind" (p. 102). This was a version of Tagore's general argument against collectives—collective institutions, movements and collective obedience—which seemed inimical to the individual's freedom of the mind. Tagore argued that this was because collectives imposed a "uniformity of purpose" (p. 102) on individuals.
4. While the *charkha* may have played a limited role in the movement, the "undue prominence" (p. 105) given to it as the only means to *swaraj* seemed to be mistaken: "Only one means of attaining *swaraj* has been definitely ordered and the rest is a vast silence" (p. 105). Tagore argued that Gandhi had been wrong in making an equation between spinning and *swaraj* because spinning alone was not sufficient to bring about *swaraj*. A more comprehensive movement seemed to be needed. "The village of which the people come together to earn for themselves food, their health, their education, to gain for themselves the joy of so doing, shall have lighted a lamp on the way to *swaraj*" (Tagore, "Striving for *Swaraj*", in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 121).
5. Tagore noted that this Gandhian connection had led to a practical problem "…by the promulgation of the confusion between *swaraj* and *charkha*, the mind of the country is being distracted from *swaraj*" (p. 118).
6. Such a narrowing down of the means to *swaraj* had led to a narrowness in the mind of the country which had made it incapable of conceptualizing more comprehensive programmes of action: "…I think that if we want the country to take up the striving for *swaraj* in earnest, then we must make an effort to hold vividly before it the complete image of that *swaraj*" (p. 119).
7. Further difficulty about the mistaken Gandhian equation (between *swaraj* and spinning) was the nature of the unthinking obedience demanded by the very formulation of the connection "spin for *swaraj*". On Tagore's view the connection between spinning and *swaraj* was not the outcome of reasonable arguments but rested on Gandhi's personal moral convictions. Most importantly, there was the Gandhian belief that spinning *qua* bread labour was a moral virtue. The directive that all must spin, therefore, seemed to be a moral *mantra*/principle, which required both individual and mass blind obedience. This in itself appeared to be contrary to the individual's freedom of the mind. For the individual's reason was so befuddled by moral arguments (in what ought to have been a political and economic programme) that the individual was no longer free to think. In the absence of individual freedom to judge, there could be no *swaraj* as home rule. For "*swaraj* alone can beget *swaraj*" (p. 120). Tagore argued that

> A man like the Mahatma may succeed in getting some of our countrymen to take an interest in this kind of uninspiring nature for a time because of their faith in his personal greatness of soul. To obey him is for them an end in itself. To me it seems that such a state of mind is not helpful for the attainment of *swaraj* (p. 119).

8. Gandhi's belief that spinning could forge political unity by creating a unity of purpose, and thereby national freedom *qua* home rule was misguided. Tagore argued that "…the foundation of *swaraj* cannot be based on any external conformity but only on the internal unity of hearts" (Tagore, "The Cult of the Charkha", in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 106). It seemed to him that the insistence on spinning and the mistaken connection between spinning and *swaraj* were obsessions for which there were no "good reason(s)" (Tagore, "Striving for *Swaraj*", in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 118).
9. Tagore argued against Gandhi's idea that *charkha* was sufficient to tackle the problem of India's poverty. As the "root cause" of India's poverty was "completely ramified" to speak of only one external symptom was not enough. It was far more important to arouse the "inward forces of wisdom of fellowship and mutual trust which make for cooperation" (Tagore, "The Cult of the Charkha", in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 103). The approach of non-cooperation implied in spinning and *swadeshi* was in itself mistaken. Poverty could be tackled more effectively by actualizing "the ideal of cooperation" (p. 109) in India's economic field. Further, Tagore argued that the "…all embracing poverty which has overwhelmed our country cannot be removed by working with our hands to the neglect of science" (p. 104). In "Striving for *Swaraj*", he argued against the Gandhian argument that spinning could help to alleviate the country's poverty by employing the surplus time in the hands of cultivators who were forced to remain idle for parts of the year. In this context he said: "To ask the cultivator to spin is to derail his mind. He may drag on with it for a while, but at the cost of disproportionate effort and therefore waste of energy" (Tagore, "Striving for *Swaraj*", in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 115). The cultivators could generate surplus income from "the line of cultivation itself" (p. 117).
10. Gandhi had argued that spinning promoted a respect for the dignity of labour. Tagore believed that the exclusive preoccupation with physical work implicit in Gandhi's idea of bread labour could itself be a distortion of man's true nature. What was at stake was more than a conflict about the status of bread labour as a *vrata*/virtue. There were conflicting understandings of what was meant by being properly human. It may be recalled that Gandhi had a clear sense of what the reconstitution of the individual Indian *swa* or self-involved. Such a reconstitution could be understood against what was *swabhavik* or properly human nature: "Man is neither mere intellect, nor the gross animal body, nor the heart or soul alone. A proper and harmonious combination of all the three is required for the making of the whole man" (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol. VI, p. 113). That harmonious combination was Gandhian *swaraj*. For Gandhi, individual *swaraj* required the governance of body and mind by the *ātman* in a manner that "restraint and renunciation" became "watchwords" (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol. VI, p. 113) for a self ever ready to relinquish the sense of an ego. As against this for Tagore human nature was dual: "…with his dual existence in body and mind, man is a *dwija*. Man has to maintain both his inner

and outer life" (Tagore, "The Cult of the Charkha", in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 104). In order that man could do this it was important that his material burdens be lightened (as indeed they had been) by the progress made by the West in the theoretical and practical sciences. Tagore spoke of the invention of the wheel and said that: "No wealth is greater than this lightening of man's material burdens" (p. 104). He argued that the idea of obligatory physical labour was contrary to man's dual inner nature. In fact it brought man "down to the level of matter" and made "him a *shudra*". This led him to state decisively that "No amount of respect outwardly accorded can save man from the inherent ingloriousness of labour divorced from mind" (p. 104).

11. Tagore argued that the act of spinning was against man's inherent right to engage in "the creative process". A person who was being thus compelled to spin, out of a sense of moral obligation, became to that extent "a machine, isolated, companionless". For Tagore, spinning was repetitive, purely mechanical, and was simply not "a creative act" (Tagore, "Striving for *Swaraj*", in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 121).
12. For Tagore, the spinning and the *swadeshi* mentality violated the wider truth of humanity because such programmes encouraged the spirit of an "extreme individualism in nations". Such individualism and related sense of collective egoism was misguided because "…in the co-operation of nations lies the true interest of each—for man is established in mutuality" (Tagore, "The Cult of the Charkha", in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 107).

Such a wide ranging variety of differences from Gandhi led Tagore to declare in 1925 that "[i]t is … God's will that man's paths of endeavour shall be various, else why these differences of mentality" (p. 112).

1.2.2.2 Gandhi's Arguments in Support of "Spinning for *Swaraj*"

Gandhi wrote a rejoinder to these differences in the *Young India* of 5 November 1925, entitled "The Poet and the *Charkha*" and followed this by "The Poet and the Wheel". He clarified that due to some "baseless suspicion" about "jealousy", roused by rumours, he needed to make "prefatory remarks" (Gandhi, "The Poet and the *Charkha*", in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 122). Such remarks seemed to be intended to clear doubts, which could have arisen in the public mind in response to Tagore's remarks on the *charkha*. Gandhi said, "Let the public understand that the Poet does

[5] Abhay Ashram was originally a social welfare organization named Savita Mission. This organization was founded by Dr. Prafulla Ghosh, Dr. Suresh Bandyopadhyay and Dr. Nripen Basu in 1910 in Comilla (then in East Bengal and Assam, now in Bangladesh). Initially named Savita Mission it was rechristened as Abhay Ashram by Gandhi in 1921.

Inspired by the ideals of Swami Vivekananda and founded during the Swadeshi Movement, the Savita Mission's primary objective was to empower the rural population though self-sufficiency, entrepreneurship and employment. It also aimed to make women self-sufficient through weaving and other cottage industries.

not deny its great economic value" (p. 122). The idea that Tagore did not completely reject the *charkha* and the *khaddar* movement was also emphasized in Gandhi's second article "The Poet and the Wheel". Gandhi noted that it was significant that Tagore had given an address at the Abhay Ashram,[5] which had been established for the purpose of "*khaddar* development" (Gandhi, "The Poet and the Wheel", in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 127). He argued that the substance of Tagore's address on that occasion included many things, which could be taken in support of the *khadi* movement. For instance, Tagore had emphasized that all Indians needed to make daily endeavours for "realizing India" and that political unity could be attained "only through work" (p. 127).

Gandhi also made it clear in these essays that the disagreements had not in any way affected his friendship with Tagore. He said: "On the contrary the frank criticism pleases me. For our friendship becomes all the richer for our disagreements" (Gandhi, "The Poet and the *Charkha*", in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 122). Tagore's arguments against spinning were a form of "poetic license" and it would be wrong to take them "literally" (p. 123). The poet had only denounced what he had "imagined to be the excesses of the *charkha* cult" (p. 124), with which he was not well acquainted. Gandhi argued that there was some misapprehension that his insistence on the *charkha* meant that everyone was "to spin the whole of his or her time". "So far is this from truth that I have asked no one to abandon his calling, but on the contrary to adorn it by giving every day only 30 min to spinning as sacrifice for the whole nation" (p. 124).

Gandhi confronted the charge that *charkha* was "calculated to bring about a deathlike sameness in the nation… ." In Gandhi's view, "*charkha* … intended to realize the essential oneness of interest among India's myriads" (p. 124). Gandhi reflected on Tagore's arguments about the *charkha* imposing sameness while the truth of the universe and of man lay in difference. He argued that both sameness and difference were reflected in creation. The *Advaita* philosophy for instance had confined difference to the apparent and emphasized the truth as the "idea of sameness or oneness". If one did not enter the debate one could take both diversity and oneness as "equally real" (p. 124). In an interesting argument, Gandhi accepted diversity but spoke of an underlying sameness in the universe and in human vocations as well. "Let both be equally real… . All I say is that there is a sameness, identity or oneness behind the multiplicity and variety. And so I hold there is an indispensable sameness also of occupation" (p. 124). Spinning and agriculture had once been common to the "vast majority" of the people. Therefore, Tagore was wrong to conclude that spinning was an imposition of sameness on an essentially diverse human world.

The shared engagement in some vocations, despite the diversity in man's occupations, seemed to Gandhi to come from the fact that man had common primary needs in food and clothing. Such needs were felt alike by all, "prince and peasant" (Gandhi, "The Poet and the *Charkha*", in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 124). It followed that all men and women "must labour" for the satisfaction of such shared human needs. Bread labour formed a common vocation for man *qua* man. Even though (by the necessity of the case) it might be that the labour of the prince could

only be "by way of symbol and sacrifice", it still remained necessary. This was so because refusal to engage in physical labour divided the world (as had happened in the case of Europe) into the exploited and the non-exploited races of men between whom a "tug of war" (p. 125) was inevitable.

Gandhi confronted Tagore's arguments against the *swadeshi* mentality arguing that: "Just as if we are to live, we must breathe not air imported from England nor eat food so imported, so we may not import cloth made in England…" (p. 125). *Swadeshi* restricted man to the use of goods made in his immediate neighbourhood. Turning to the argument about the ingloriousness of physical labour and the need for machinery to save man from drudgery Gandhi was clear: "Machinery has its place; it has come to stay. But it must not be allowed to displace the necessary human labour" (p. 125). Lastly, Gandhi accepted Tagore's point about the necessity of cooperation in economics to alleviate poverty. However, he believed that "… Indian circumstances being different, the method of working out co-operation is necessarily different. For Indian distress every effort at co-operation has to center around [sic] the *charkha*…" (p. 125). Gandhi accepted that such cooperation might take the wider contours of national reconstruction but insisted nevertheless on the centrality of spinning.

Before closing the discussion on this phase of the debate between Tagore and Gandhi, it is useful to note that around this time they developed differences about another issue. This difference was about contrary understandings of *varna* and did not explicitly form part of the exchange of letters between them. However, that it seemed to be a powerful undercurrent to the debate might be borne out by the fact that it carried over into the next phase. This is supported by two things that happened in the third phase: Tagore had misgivings about the Poona Pact; and he wrote the play *Tasher Desh* (*The Kingdom of Cards*) in 1933.

In connection with the difference on *varna* it may be noted that Tagore wrote an essay, "The *Shudra* Habit" in 1927 (in *Modern Review*). In this essay, Tagore obliquely critiqued *varna*. He argued that there were practical and moral effects of following *varna.* Tagore said:

> The *dharma* of the *shudra* is the only one that is as a matter of fact extant today in this land of India, a state of things complacently accepted by the orthodox believers in the perpetuation of the *dharma* of caste…. Where else, indeed, in all the world can be found the likes of those whose very *dharma* has reduced them to hereditary slaves? (Tagore, "The *Shudra* Habit", in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 12)

On a contrary note, Gandhi reiterated his position in support on *varna* in *Young India* in 1928. Though this issue was not part of the debate between them in an overt sense, that they differed seemed clear from Tagore's earlier essay. Gandhi maintained that "*Varna* had nothing to do with caste" (Gandhi, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 11). He said that *varnashramadharma* defined as "pre-determination of the choice of man's profession" according to his ancestor's occupation was economically efficient and reduced competitiveness and conflict. Gandhi argued that "…*Varna* is the best form of insurance for happiness and for religious pursuit…. I derive it from the *Bhagavad Gita*…" (p. 11).

This difference between Tagore and Gandhi might seem to have been carried over into the next phase of the debate when Tagore wrote the play *Tasher Desh* in 1933. In the play, Tagore's criticism of *varna* and traditional rules was set in a fictitious land of the dynasty of cards where it was believed that four different groups were created from the legendary deity *Brahma*. Significantly, in this play there was a reference to an editor, Golam, who was the self-proclaimed "preserver of culture in this Island of cards" (Tagore 2011, p. 444). In the context of their differences about *varna*, in 1928, it is possible to interpret this as a reference to Gandhi.

1.2.3 The Third Phase (1929–1933)

Tagore was travelling for about 14 months (in 1929–1930), giving lectures in Japan, Indo-China, Canada, USA, the USSR and five West European countries. During this time no letters were exchanged between Gandhi and Tagore. On 18 January 1930, Tagore visited Gandhi at Sabarmati Ashram while he was on a tour to collect funds for his school at Santiniketan. Gandhi wrote to Tagore (minutes before his arrest in January 1932), informing him that the civil disobedience movement was to be resumed. They wrote to each other again when Gandhi was fasting in Yeravda Jail in September 1932. In fact, Tagore went to Pune to meet Gandhi and Gandhi broke the fast in his presence. Another set of letters was exchanged when Gandhi went on another fast on the issue of caste restrictions for entry into the Guruvayyur temple. At this time Tagore tried to dissuade Gandhi from fasting. A third exchange took place in May 1933 when Gandhi resolved to fast again. Though Tagore praised Gandhi for his physical and moral courage in public, in his letters to Gandhi, he argued against the dangers of self-mortification in fasting. About this time, Tagore also articulated his reservations about fasting for temple entry, arguing that temples and mosques were merely places where divinity was "enclosed in a brick and mortar" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 139) structure. The last exchange in this period was on the issue of the Poona Pact.[6] On 24 July 1933, Tagore issued a press statement in which he endorsed the pact but expressed his reservations about it. Reacting to this Gandhi invited him to convene

[6] The Poona Pact refers to an agreement between Dr. B.R Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi signed on 24 September 1932 at Yeravda Central Jail in Pune. To draft a new Constitution involving self-rule for the native Indians, the British had invited leaders of different parties in the Round Table Conferences held between 1930–1932. Mahatma Gandhi did not attend the first and last but attended the second of the Conferences. Dr. Ambedkar raised a demand for separate electorates for the Untouchables. The British government agreed with Dr. Ambedkar's demand, and the British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald's Communal Award to the depressed classes was to be incorporated into the constitution in the governance of British India. Gandhi strongly opposed this Communal Award on the grounds that it would disintegrate Hindu society. He began an indefinite hunger strike at Yeravda Central Jail from 20 September 1932. A compromise was reached on 24 September 1932.

a meeting of the principal parties to convince them that injustice had been done to Bengal. Tagore suspended the discussion, but in 1933 itself he wrote *Tasher Desh* giving a playwright's version of his earlier criticism of *varna*.

There seemed to be two main issues at this stage of the exchange—fasting and the Poona Pact. In 1932 Tagore had been supportive of Gandhi's fast for "India's unity and her social integrity" (p. 133). At that time he had thought that fasting was part of the Gandhian methodology of resistance and consisted in the "…appeal of … self suffering to the conscience of our own countrymen" (pp. 133–134). However, when Gandhi followed the fast in 1932 with another fast for temple entry to the Guruvayyur temple,[7] Tagore started having some doubts about fasting as a method of resistance to injustice. In this context, he argued that frequent use of fasting "may psychologically be too much for us properly to evaluate and effectively to utilize for the uplift of humanity" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 138). He cautioned Gandhi that it would be worthless to risk a life which could be well used simply for "the activities of some isolated groups of individuals" (p. 138). On the eve of Gandhi's third fast in 1933, Tagore's difficulties became more pronounced. He wrote to Gandhi (on 9 May 1933) that though there are "things that are ugly and wrong" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 141), one cannot despair and court death "unless there is absolutely no other alternative for the expression of the ultimate purpose of life itself" (p. 141). Tagore wrote to Gandhi again on 11 May 1933. He examined Gandhi's idea that fasting could be a penance for the sins of others and thereby become a part of a moral aspirant's progress on the path of *ahimsa* and truth. Tagore disagreed with this idea and argued that: "The fasting which has no direct action upon the conduct of misdoers and which may abruptly terminate one's power further to serve those who need help, cannot be universally accepted and therefore it is all the more unacceptable for any individual who has the responsibility to represent humanity" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 142).

Pre-empting Gandhi's defence that fasting was a purely individual choice of penance and not a matter of setting examples for others, Tagore clearly rejected such arguments. He said: "If that were true, you ought to have performed it in absolute secrecy as a special mystic rite which only claims its one sacrifice beginning and ending in yourself" (p. 142). Tagore also raised a somewhat more serious doubt about fasting, arguing that in the hands of "lesser men" such a method of resistance "opens up an easy and futile path of duty by urging them to take a plunge into a dark abyss of self-mortification" (p. 143). However, in June 1933, there was an editorial note in *Harijan* quoting Tagore's statement to the public about the significance of Gandhi's fast. In this statement, Tagore appeared to be sympathetic to Gandhi fast and emphasized the need for all Indians to lend their

[7] The Guruvayyur Temple was in the Ponnani Taluk of Malabar which is now in Kerala. In order to secure the entry of Untouchables into this temple there was a 10-month-long protest, and fasting by K. Kelappan, popularly known as 'Kerala Gandhi' (Following Gandhiji's advice Kelappan teminated the fast on 2 October 1932). Gandhi's support drew national attention to the temple entry movement and on 12 November 1936, the Maharajah of Travancore signed the historic Temple Entry Proclamation.

support to Gandhi by engaging in "supreme purification" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 145). He referred to Gandhi as the "great *Tapasvi*" (p. 145) who had "courted death with the determination of equalizing the high and the low" (p. 145).

Somewhat related with the doubts about fasting were doubts about temple entry as a worthwhile goal to be achieved by such resistance. In this context, Tagore wrote to Gandhi in March 1933 that he did not believe in "the idea of divinity being enclosed in a brick and mortar temple for the special purpose of exploitation by a particular group of people" (p. 139). He referred to some sects of the *baul*s in Bengal who had been denied temple entry and went on to "realize the presence of God in the open air" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 139).

The last set of issues at this time pertained to the Poona Pact. Tagore made it clear in a press statement (24 July 1933) that while he understood the terrible urgency of accepting the pact as Gandhi's life had "depended" on such an acceptance he felt that "justice had certainly been sacrificed in the case of Bengal" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 200). He wrote to Gandhi in this connection (on 8 August 1933):

> Justice is an important aspect of truth and if it is allowed to be violated for the sake of immediate peace or speedy cutting of some political knots in the long run, it is sure to come back to those who are apparently benefitted by it and will pay a heavy price for the concession cheaply gained (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 149).

1.2.4 The Fourth Phase (1934–1941)

The last phase of the debate between Tagore and Gandhi centred on four points. Firstly, there was an exchange of letters about Gandhi's statement to the press in 1934 "linking the Bihar calamity (earthquake) with the sin of untouchability" (Gandhi, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 159). The second group of letters started around 1935 and these arose out of Tagore's concern for the financial stability of Visva-Bharati, which was "…like a vessel … carrying the cargo…" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 178) of his life's "best treasure" (p. 178). The third issue was related to the second one. In Gandhi's letters concerning the financial stability of Santiniketan he had objected to Tagore's "begging expeditions" (Gandhi, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 165) to raise funds for that institution. Tagore argued that presenting his musical creations could not be described as begging expeditions but were a part of his special vocation as a poet. The last issue concerned an exchange in 1939 regarding the attitude taken by the Congress establishment (led by prominent Gandhians) towards Subhas Chandra Bose. The hostility of the "Congress high command" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 173) finally forced Bose to

[8] Early in September 1933, Mr. E.J. Burge, District Magistrate was shot dead at the police parade ground in Midnapore. The Midnapore Collegiate School was ransacked. The British government embarked on a policy of repression in the district.

resign from the post of president of the Congress. Apart from these major issues, Tagore and Gandhi exchanged some letters about the government repression in Midnapore (in current West Bengal) after the assassination of the magistrate,[8] the condition of prisoners at the Andaman Islands,[9] and the illness and death of their friend C.F. Andrews. Gandhi last visited Santiniketan in February 1940. On 1 October 1940, when Tagore was very ill, Gandhi wrote to him saying "stay yet awhile" (Gandhi, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 180). On Tagore's birthday in April 1941 they exchanged greetings in telegrams and this was their last communication.

To turn now to the exchanges on the four major issues in this period: In 1934, Gandhi was reported in the press as saying that the earthquake in Bihar in 1934 was a "divine chastisement" for the "great sin" of untouchability (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 156). Tagore wrote to Gandhi on 28 January 1934 seeking clarification about the statement. On receiving Gandhi's confirmation Tagore issued a statement in "painful surprise" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 158) at Gandhi's remarks. The statement appeared on 16 February 1934 in *Harijan*. Tagore made four interconnected arguments. Firstly, he said that Gandhi who had induced a "freedom from fear and feebleness in the minds of his countrymen" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 159) was wrong to encourage "the elements of unreason in those very minds—unreason, which is a fundamental source of all the blind powers that drive us against freedom and self-respect" (p. 159). To Tagore such an encouragement of an "unscientific view of things" was all the more unfortunate because it was accepted by a large part of the people. Secondly, Tagore considered this view of things to be positively mistaken, as it went against the "truism … that physical catastrophes have their inevitable and exclusive origin in certain combination of physical facts" (p. 158). Thirdly, Tagore objected to the association of "ethical principles with cosmic phenomena". In itself a confusion of two kinds of discourse, in this case it seemed to arrogate a moral superiority to "human nature" as against providence, since it attributed to providence an indulgence "in orgies of the worst behavior possible" (p. 158) simply in order to preach moral lessons in good behaviour. Fourthly, Tagore argued that though men have been parties to "iniquities of the darkest kind", the history of man gives evidence of the fact that his "sins and errors, however enormous, have not enough force to drag down the structure of creation to ruins" (p. 159).

[9] During July–August 1937 political prisoners in the Andamans were on an indefinite hunger strike in protest at the inhuman torture by the police. Three of them died during the strike. On 2 August 1937 a meeting was held at the town Hall in Calcutta demanding release of the prisoners. Tagore played a leading role in the movement for the release. On 16 August 1937 Gandhi sent him a telegram assuring him that he was doing his utmost to end the hunger strike and save the lives of the patriots who were in prison.

[10] This was one of the worst earthquakes in India's history. This 8.1 magnitude earthquake occurred on 15 January 1934 at around 2:13 PM (I.S.T.) (08:43 UTC) and caused widespread damage in northern Bihar and in Nepal. Munger and Muzaffarpur were completely destroyed.

Gandhi defended his statement about the connection between the sin of untouchability and the Bihar earthquake[10] in an article entitled "Superstition versus Faith". This appeared in *Harijan* in February 1934. He reaffirmed that he had spoken with "the greatest deliberation" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 160) when he made the connection at Tinnevelly.[11] Gandhi argued that there was "an indissoluble marriage between matter and spirit" (p. 161). This explained the connection between physical "catastrophies" (Gandhi, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 158) and "man's morals" (Gandhi, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 160). Gandhi admitted that (like the existence of God) the thesis that "physical phenomena" (Gandhi, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 159) and "spiritual" causes are linked could not be strictly proved. However, he "instinctively felt" that there was such a connection. Even if such a belief turned out to be "ill-founded" (p. 160), it could be morally useful; for, though physical catastrophes like an earthquake might be soon forgotten, a "moral lesson" could well be learnt and motivate the believers towards renewed efforts at "self-purification" (p. 160). Arguing against Tagore's contention that man's sins and errors have no power to drag down the structure of creation, Gandhi said: "On the contrary I have the faith that our own sins have more force to ruin that structure than any mere physical phenomenon" (pp. 160–161). A "living recognition of the union" between man's morals and physical phenomenon might in fact have enabled many to use "physical catastrophe(s) for their own moral uplifting [sic]" (p. 161).

The second issue in this period concerned the funding for Santiniketan. On 12 September 1935, Tagore wrote to Gandhi expressing his inability (given his advancing years) to raise money through "constant begging excursions with absurdly meager results" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 161). (The use of the words "begging excursions" would later become a bone of contention between the two men.) Tagore said he knew of "none else but" (p. 161) Gandhi to whom he could entrust the responsibility. On 13 October 1935, Gandhi replied that it was indeed "unthinkable" that Tagore should "have to undertake another begging mission" at his age (Gandhi, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 162). In March 1936, Gandhi arranged a sum of rupees 60,000 for Santiniketan. On 10 February 1937, Tagore nominated Gandhi as a life trustee of Visva-Bharati, but Gandhi declined due to what he described as his "amazing limitations" (p. 164). Gandhi last visited Santiniketan on 2 February 1940. Tagore handed him a letter asking him to accept that institution under his protection. On 19 February, Gandhi replied saying that he would do all that he could "in the common endeavour to assure its permanence" (p. 178).

The third issue was related to the second. In a letter to Tagore (dated 19 February 1937), Gandhi declined to be a life trustee of Visva-Bharati and protested that it was unsuitable that Tagore should be contemplating another "begging expedition" to raise funds. Tagore sent a reply (on 26 February 1937) expressing "painful amazement" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 165) at this charge. He argued that it was Gandhi's "own temperament" which prevented him from being able to understand "the

[11] Tirunelveli also known as Nellai was historically known (during British rule) as Tinnevelly. It is a city in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

dignity" of Tagore's "mission". That mission had to do with the "culture of the human mind in its broadest sense" (p. 165). For Tagore, it was a "poet's religion to entertain in his life a solemn faith in his own function" (p. 166). Tagore argued that the money raised by his performances was a "grateful homage" to his art from those who had "the sensitiveness of soul to respond to it" (p. 166). Later (in a letter dated 2 March 1937), Gandhi clarified that he appreciated the poet's religion and he wanted Tagore to express his art but "never with the burden hanging over" (Gandhi, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 167) him of collecting money for Visva-Bharati.

The last issue in this phase of the exchange concerned the hostility of the Congress leadership towards Subhas Chandra Bose and the condition of the Congress in general. On 29 March 1939, Tagore wrote to Gandhi expressing distress at the divisions between the Congress high command and the province of Bengal. "At the last congress session some rude hands have deeply hurt Bengal with an ungracious persistence. Please apply without delay balm to the wound with your own kind hands…" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, pp. 168–169). In July 1939, Tagore wrote an article entitled "The Congress" in *Modern Review*. This was an account of divisions and power play within the Congress. This article was a translation of a letter written in Bengali to the poet Amiyo Chakraborty. Tagore noted that with its rise to power Congress had begun to have "little to fear" (Tagore, "The Congress", in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 171) from the government, but much more to fear from within. Such an outcome was natural given that power generates "toxins" which "eventually destroy it" (p. 171). This almost prophetic argument about the divisions in the internal organization of the Congress seemed to echo Tagore's general argument about power as essentially corruptive and as destructive of the individual's freedom to reason. Symptomatic of such degeneration were "lapses in regard to vital matters of mutual courtesy and forbearance of constitutional procedure" (p. 171). Tagore also made the point that religious divides such as the Hindu-Muslim differences had already created schisms in the Congress. There was the added difficulty of divisions between the provinces. Such differences had led to deep "internal discords" (p. 172) within the party. However, despite his fears about the divisions within the Congress, Tagore emphasized that the party should continue to work "under the guidance of the Mahatma" (p. 170).

1.3 The Importance of the Tagore–Gandhi Debate

From this account of the issues that divided Gandhi and Tagore three points appear as immediately striking. Firstly, it becomes clear that the issues in this debate were only symptomatic of more substantial differences. Consequently, many issues raised in this debate could make a significant contribution to the philosophical reinterpretation of ideas and arguments in Gandhi and Tagore. Secondly, the debate makes it evident that India's politics under the leadership of Gandhi was a politics

which was open to discussion and debate with the ideas of those who disagreed with its primary categories. The fact that Gandhi thought seriously about (and responded to) Tagore's criticism of his moral and political conceptions shows that Gandhi's politics was informed by intellectual engagements about the fundamental categories around which it was organized. Thirdly, this debate which carried on for almost half of their individual lifetimes seemed to make Tagore and Gandhi better friends. Consequently, the debate can reveal insights about the nature of enduring friendships. Clearly, this debate is fairly important for various reasons.

It appears that the issues that divided Gandhi and Tagore were more substantial than might appear from a consideration of the immediate differences between them. What was at issue in the debate, for instance, was not only a vision of what India ought to become, but what ought to be the proper understanding of freedom/*swarajya* and the proper means to achieve freedom. Tagore and Gandhi shared a dual understanding of *swaraj* as both individual and collective freedom. However, Tagore saw individual freedom primarily in terms of the Enlightenment (perhaps close to Kant) as the individual's freedom to respond to reason. He was clear that home rule should be thought of in terms that critically interrogated the Western idea of the nation state. Gandhi thought of individual freedom as self-rule/moral self-mastery. Unlike Tagore, he was comfortable in speaking of home rule in terms of the nation state. The debate was also about the nature of truth. It raised the question of how "cognitive" truth—truth pursued in economics or science—could be related to an individual's moral experiences. Consequently, this debate is not merely of historical or political interest, but is fairly important to the philosophical reconstruction of central ideas in Gandhi and Tagore. In this context, it is significant that the issues raised in the course of the arguments exchanged in the debate might not be so readily available from the huge corpus of their individual writings. For instance, it is interesting that the debate brought up specific arguments about the nature of truth and freedom. The very fact that Gandhi engaged in a debate about truth makes it apparent that (contrary to contemporary philosophical reconstructions) he did not have a relativist understanding of truth. As they argued about the nature of truth and freedom for over 26 years, both Gandhi and Tagore clearly believed that people could debate about, and arrive at, the truth.

The second important thing about this debate is that it shows the conceptual openness of India's politics under the leadership of Gandhi. This was both a public political debate and an intellectual exchange. In itself the fact that there could be a public debate about the non-cooperation movement, which was a critical episode in India's political history, is surely significant. It was also no small matter that the leader of a mass political movement could be in an ideational interaction with Tagore (a litterateur, essayist, musician, poet and artist) in a debate and dialogue characterized by fairly substantial philosophical differences. Gandhi's political activism seemed to have been informed by intellectual engagements about the primary categories that constituted his political activities—freedom, nation, *satyagraha* and the non-cooperation movement. This suggests that, though Gandhi

was not a "professional" philosopher, his central ideas and arguments can be philosophically reinterpreted for there was a philosophical vision that informed what Gandhi said and did. The politics of the national movement under Gandhi was constituted by a deference to, and an active engagement with, contesting visions of the primary categories in terms of which the movement was being led. In that sense, then, the politics of the Gandhian movement could be described as truly *ahimsanat/* non-violent.

The third aspect of the debate is that it suggests a relationship between disagreement, truth and friendship. One can look at the 26 years of the Gandhi–Tagore relationship in terms of the strong disagreements between them or in terms of their mutual respect for the differences between them. It is significant that these differences existed alongside growing warmth, dependence on each other's critical evaluations and a progressive interest in each other's concerns. Their relationship presents an example of a friendship in the midst of differences. On an empirical note, one may record that in all the years that Tagore and Gandhi exchanged divergent views on fundamental political categories, the affection between them only seemed to have increased. This can be supported by the following facts. Gandhi sought Tagore's advice before any major course of action. For instance, he wrote to Tagore a few hours before the resumption of civil disobedience in January 1932: "I am just stretching my tired limbs on the mattress and as I try to steal a wink of sleep, I think of you…" (Gandhi, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 133). Again, Gandhi wrote to Tagore from Yeravda Jail in 1932 before starting his fast on the issue of depressed classes and separate electorates: "I enter the fiery gates at noon. If you can bless the effort, I want it. You have been a candid friend often speaking your thoughts aloud. I had looked forward to a firm opinion from you, one way or the other. But you have refused to criticize… ." (Gandhi, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 134). Though he did not know of it, Tagore's cable in support of his action had just crossed his letter. Before Gandhi fasted for the entry of the depressed classes into the Guruvayyur temple, he again wrote to Tagore in November 1932. Interestingly, Gandhi himself at times took the initiative in having Tagore's protests published. Gandhi sent a telegram to Tagore on 2 February 1934 related to Tagore's arguments against the statement about the Bihar earthquake. Gandhi encouraged Tagore to publish his protest, saying "…publish your protest. It can be published at your end or mine as you desire" (Gandhi, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 156). It was finally published at Gandhi's end in *Harijan* on 16 February 1934.

It is also evidence of their growing affection that in later years they tried to protect each other in their essays before the public. For instance, Gandhi defended Tagore in "The Poet and the *Charkha*" (November 1925) and "The Poet and the Wheel" (March 1926). In both these essays, he attempted to blunt public opposition to Tagore's criticism of the *charkha* saying that "…the poet does not deny its great economic value" (Gandhi, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 122). Gandhi affirmed the role of disagreement in friendship by publicly reaffirming his friendship with Tagore:

> If every disagreement were to displease, since no two men agree exactly on all points, life would be a bundle of unpleasant sensations and a perfect nuisance. On the contrary, the

> frank criticism pleases me…. Friends to be friends are not called upon to agree even on most points. Only disagreement must have no sharpness, much less bitterness, about them. And I gratefully admit that there is none about the Poet's criticism (p. 122).

Tagore on his part also tried to support Gandhi in difficult moments. For instance, though he was often privately critical of Gandhi's fasts (in letters exchanged between them), in a public essay written in June 1933 he asked the nation to support the fast by constructive effort. In his essay, criticizing the Congress in 1939 he explicitly supported the leadership of Gandhi. As already noted, he turned to Gandhi for the financial stability of Santiniketan at many difficult times in his life. That they seem only to have become closer through their exchanges might indicate that friendship can only be enduring if it is based upon truth. A commitment to truth as a sort of realism requires that friends must be able to express their differences so that they can gain a shared understanding of how things really are in the world and between them. This was perhaps the sort of friendship that Tagore and Gandhi had shared. Their lives were enriched due to their ability to learn from the differences between them. This book examines the debate between Gandhi and Tagore in order to recover the philosophical issues that underlay the exchanges between them.

Given that a large part of Tagore's arguments seem to have been preoccupied with Gandhi's formulation of moral principles requiring "unquestioning obedience" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 78), Chap. 2 of this book makes a philosophical attempt to reconstruct Gandhi's fundamental moral insights. The chapter examines the philosophical implications of Gandhi's reinterpretation of Patañjali's *yama*s/*niyama*s as virtues. Gandhi's refusal to segregate moral evaluation from economic and scientific discourse (during the course of this debate) raised questions about the nature of truth and Gandhi's conception of the role of moral judgement in the good human life. Chapter 3 examines a contemporary philosophical reconstruction of Gandhi in the work of Akeel Bilgrami. This chapter discusses Gandhi's position on moral judgement, moral criticism and moral principles in the context of insights thrown up by his exchanges with Tagore. Tagore did not have substantial differences from Gandhi about the nature of truth, but he had apprehensions about the possibilities of untruth, which were present in Gandhi's methods to arrive at the truth. Chapter 4 of this book brings out Tagore's insights about the possibilities of untruth in Gandhi's methods of resistance for the sake of truth. These were methods such as fasting, *satyagraha* and non-cooperation. In this context, the chapter discusses Tagore's scepticism about collective action. Tagore was closer to the Enlightenment and its central ideas than Gandhi. The last chapter brings out the influence of the Enlightenment (and of Kant) on Tagore's conception of freedom in the context of his differences from Gandhi. The conclusion brings out the differences and similarities between Tagore and Gandhi in their negotiation of a relationship to tradition and modernity.

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Chapter 2
Of *Mantras* and Unquestioned Creeds: Reconstructing Gandhi's Moral Insights

Abstract Tagore raised objections against Gandhi's emphasis on taking vows/*vrata*s to obey *shastric* injunctions and the related practice of *tapas*/austerity. This chapter examines Gandhi's central moral ideas—his list of virtues, the primacy he accorded to *ahimsa,* the centrality of *tapasya* and the insistence on bodily purity. Though Gandhi considerably reinterpreted terms such as *tapas, vrata, yama* and *niyama* his relationship to the traditional texts of Indian philosophy cannot be entirely overlooked. While this chapter reconstructs the independent, and at times original, philosophical arguments that informed Gandhi's moral vision, it also brings out the influence of the *Yoga Sūtra* on Gandhi's moral ideas.

Keywords Patañjali · *Yoga Sūtra* · Virtue · *Vrata*/vows · *Tapasya* · Truth · Inner voice · *Brahmacarya*

The last chapter gave an account of the arguments exchanged between Tagore and Gandhi. Though they disagreed about many things—the non-cooperation movement, nationalism and internationalism—a central preoccupation in that debate was the nature of individual *swaraj*/freedom. In this context, Tagore had argued against Gandhi's insistence that practicing virtues (what Tagore called *mantras*) was a means to individual freedom/*swaraj*. For Tagore, individual freedom primarily meant freedom in the mind, while for Gandhi individual freedom was a moral notion related to self-restraint. Gandhi argued that a demand for home rule must be normatively grounded in individual *swaraj qua* self-rule. For Gandhi self-rule would be attained through the practice of virtues such as non-violence, celibacy, etc. and the practice of the virtues would take the individual progressively closer to matters of fact or truth.

One can ask, of course, about the connection that Gandhi saw between moral realism/the progress towards truth and moral excellence. An answer could emerge if one reflects upon how much of wrongdoing is preceded by a failure to apprehend how things are outside of how we might want to see them. Gandhi thought that the chief enemy of moral excellence was personal fantasy driven by the ego and its self-aggrandizing set of desires, which prevented the individual self from seeing how things really were. To be free or self-ruled, by such an account, was to be free from

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the tyranny of ego-driven desires. The individual would then be able to act from a form of personhood ruled by a non-egoistic orientation towards truth. Gandhi, like Aristotle, had a teleological understanding of human nature. The *end* of the properly human life was truth and the primary means to truth was the practice of the virtues with pre-eminence accorded to *ahimsa*. Such a pre-eminence can be explained by understanding that Gandhi's practice of *ahimsa* (understood as an equality of deference to "others") was intended to control inflated, self-driven distortions and thereby help one to see how things really were. It was in such a context (to bring into focus the need for the control of the ego associated with the individual's mind and body) that Gandhi went to the philosophical systems of the past and recreated the metaphor of the *ātman*. That metaphor was meant to indicate the possibility of a more authentic form of personhood significantly free from the distorting sense of inflated self-concern. It may be noted that in the traditional schools of Indian philosophy, it is an individual's body and mind, which are conceived as invariably associated with the sense of an "I". This association can perhaps be explained on account of the distinctiveness of an individual's body and mind. Unlike his contemporaries in colonial Indian politics, Gandhi found it fairly easy to engage with the past. The *Yoga Sūtra* became the resource for an expanded Gandhian list of virtues.

It is clear that the issues at stake in the debate between Tagore and Gandhi were symptomatic of deeper divergences. Part of the explanation for these divergences can be philosophically recovered by considering the different ways in which they each negotiated a relationship to ancient India's philosophical past. One way in which Gandhi's relationship to India's philosophical past can be explored is by bringing out the influence of the *Yoga Sūtra* on Gandhi's central moral concepts and their interconnections. The Gandhian vows/*vrata*s were derived from the traditional *yama niyama* of Indian philosophy. These *yama/niyama*s were elaborately described by the Jains in the *Ācārāṅga Sūtra*s and were reiterated in the *Yoga Sūtra*. It is interesting that Gandhi had himself acknowledged the moral indebtedness of his own formulation, of what he termed "virtues" (Gandhi 1955, vol. 33, p. 448) to Patañjali. Gandhi said: "…that prince of yogis Patañjali, gave the first place to *yamas* … and *niyamas* … and held as eligible for yogic practices only those who have gone through the preliminary discipline" (Gandhi 1955, vol. 46, p. 192). The five cardinal virtues were "…non-violence, truth, non-stealing, celibacy, non-possession." The five casual virtues were "…bodily purity, contentment, the study of scriptures, austerity, and meditation on God…"[1] (Gandhi 1955, vol. 46, p. 192). The list of *yama*s/cardinal virtues was later expanded by Gandhi to include what could be reconstructed as moral maxims (borrowing the Kantian sense of a maxim as a subjective principle of action) or moral truths which were contextual: "…the five have been expanded into eleven…. They are non-violence, truth, non-stealing,

[1] This is from the electronic edition of Gandhi's *Collected works* (Gandhi 1947), accessible online at http://gandhiserve.org/cwmg/cwmg.html. Note that between the *Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi* (100 Volumes, 1955) and the electronic edition (*eCWMG*) are disputed differences of content and different volumes and page numbers.

brahmacharya, non-possession, bread labour, control of the palate, fearlessness, equal regard for all religions, *swadeshi* and removal of untouchability" (Gandhi 1947, vol. 95, p. 190). The *yama*s and *niyama*s were reinterpreted by Gandhi as virtues or dispositions of character necessary for man if he was to reach the *telos* of human life, which was Truth/God. To reach Truth was also simultaneously to achieve self-mastery or true freedom. It is important to note that Gandhi's Truth was both a transcendent object, i.e. a *telos*/end of human existence and a virtue/disposition whose cultivation was to inform the life of a quest towards a progressive realism in moral matters.

In order to situate the debate between Gandhi and Tagore about the nature of freedom, the practice of virtue/*vrata*s, and Gandhi's *tapas*, it is essential to reinterpret Gandhi's fundamental moral insights. Accordingly this chapter will bring out the philosophical possibilities of Gandhi's moral ideas. Section 2.1 discusses the central moral ideas of Yoga in the context of differences from the classical Sāṅkhya. The purpose of such a discussion is to isolate central moral concepts of Yoga from the atheistic and dualistic metaphysics of the Sāṅkhya. For it appeared to have been specifically in the moral discipline recommended by the *Yoga Sūtra* (as distinct from the Sāṅkhya) that Gandhi found a philosophical resource to construct an ethics oriented towards the subjugation of the individual ego in the interest of truth. As is well known, the *Yoga Sūtra* was centrally concerned with the purification of the individual's body and mind and the control of the sense of ego or *asmitā*. This perhaps was what attracted Gandhi to the Yoga and to Patañjali's formulation of *ahimsa*. Gandhi of course did not simply reiterate these concepts in his mind and philosophical practice. He engaged with them in formulating what were distinctively his own central moral insights. Section 2.2 makes a philosophical reconstruction of those moral insights by locating them in the context of the arguments of a more contemporary moral philosopher Iris Murdoch, whose thinking about the moral life comes surprisingly close to Gandhi. Since Tagore raised many arguments against Gandhi's *mantras*/vows and his practice of austerity, fasting and *tapas*, Sect. 2.3 (across four subsections) will examine Gandhi's conception of the virtues, vows/*vrata*s and *tapasya*.

2.1 Gandhi and Yoga: A Brief Overview of Yoga

> *Yogah Chittavrittinirodhah.* If the waves are continually rising, we describe the sea as stormy. There is no essential difference between the sea and the waves in it.… Telling himself this, a man may become steady in mind and let the wave of desire subside in it. Patanjali tells us that if we restrain the waves from rising, we shall know whether the master of the *chitta* is desire or whether it is God[2] (Gandhi 1926 in 1947, vol. 37, p. 222).

[2] A footnote was added here: 'Yoga is controlling the activity of the mind' (Patanjali, *Yoga Sūtra*); Gandhi, "Discourses on the Gita", 24-02-1926.

The metaphor of the control of the mind and body is the central preoccupation in Gandhi's reflections on the *Yoga Sūtra.* There are over 200 references to the *Yogadarśana* (the Yoga system of philosophy) and to "Bhagwan Patanjali" (Gandhi 1947, vol. 77, p. 327) in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. (In these references, Yoga is mostly referred to as an independent system and not as allied to Sāṅkhya.) In 1946, Gandhi said that many years ago a friend of his used to carry Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra* constantly in his pocket. Although Gandhi did not know Sanskrit yet, the friend would come to him often to consult about the meanings of some of the *sūtra*s (Gandhi 1946 in 1947, vol. 93, p. 203). It is also worth noting that Gandhi had credited Patañjali with the discovery of *ahimsa*. "Patanjali is responsible for the scientific discovery of ahimsa" (Gandhi 1933 in 1947, vol. 59, p. 494).

It is strange that there has been no mention of the philosophical influence of Yoga on Gandhi's ideas in the very many philosophical or academic works on Gandhi. If indeed Gandhi had significantly engaged with Patañjali's moral insights (and such an engagement had philosophically influenced his own moral ideas) then this could indicate a serious lacuna in the philosophical attention, which Gandhi has received in recent years. Gandhi's moral ideas have been largely seen by philosophers as influenced primarily in the Indian tradition by Jainism, the *Gītā* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. In the Western tradition, such influence has been traced to Tolstoy, Christianity (particularly, the Sermon on the Mount) and Ruskin. The complete absence of any serious mention of the influence of Patañjali's moral philosophy on Gandhian ideas might be of course one more instance of what has been identified as a serious problem affecting contemporary scholarship on Indian philosophy, which is "…the marginalization of the ethical or moral content of Indian Philosophy" (Ranganathan 2008, p. 3). Such marginalization would of course restrict the possibilities of seeking for philosophical continuities in the traditions of moral or ethical ideas in the history of Indian philosophy—for instance, that of the continuing influence of an ancient philosophical tradition of Yoga on the work and moral ideas of a more contemporary thinker like Gandhi.

In this context, one may note that scholars have argued that there is a rich moral tradition in Yoga philosophy: "Contrary to the arguments presented by many scholars, which associate Patañjali's Yoga exclusively with extreme asceticism, mortification, denial, and the renunciation and abandonment of "material existence' (*prakṛti*) in favour of an isolated "spiritual state" (*puruṣa*)…" (Whicher 2008, p. 160) there is "…a rich affective, moral, and cognitive as well as spiritual potential…" (Whicher 2008, p. 168) in Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra*.

It is strange that a discussion about the differences between Gandhi and Tagore has involved the ancient *yogi* Patañjali. I am taking a conceptual detour into the contemporary debate about the significance of morality in Patañjali because it is part of the argument of this chapter that Gandhi's understanding of individual moral life—of the *yama*s as virtues, of *tapasya* and freedom—was influenced by his engagement with classical Yoga. However, in order to establish the influence of Patañjali's moral ideas on Gandhi, it is necessary to enter (albeit briefly) into debates about the presence of a strong and very distinctive ethics in the Yoga

system. A brief discussion of the history and basic ideas of Patañjali's Yoga philosophy, and differences from the Sāṅkhya, must preceed any discussion of Gandhi's reading of Yoga ethics. This is essential because the debate about the marginalization of the ethics of Yoga is closely allied to the debate about the differences between Yoga and the Sāṅkhya with which it is identified by most scholars of indology. A reader who is well-acquainted with the Sāṅkhya and Yoga systems may skip this section as it is purely introductory and preliminary to bringing out the affinities between Gandhi's central moral ideas and important moral arguments in Patañjali.

The *Yoga Sūtra* of Patañjali is one of the major classical works of Indian philosophy codified in the second or third century CE. The idea of yoga in the *Yoga Sūtra* primarily stands for meditation or austerities of the mind and only secondarily for physical austerities. The *Yoga Sūtra* is not the first text in Indian philosophy to take an interest in yoga. Meditation, an integral part of the *Yoga Sūtra,* was practised in Jain and Buddhist traditions and yoga is referred to in the later Vedic period. In the *Katha Upaniṣad*, which is the oldest Upanishad to deal with yoga (5 BCE), there is a definition of Yoga as the restraint of the mind and the holding back of the senses (11.vi.10-11 in Ranganathan 2008, p. 36). The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* (11.vi.10-11 in Ranganathan 2008, p. 36) says that the *Brahman* created the world through *tapas* and that such *tapas* consists in knowledge/meditation. However, though the idea of yoga appears in later Vedic literature it is argued that it had an even earlier origin: "It likely had a distinct, non-vedic origin, known as the *Śramaṇa* tradition. The *Śramaṇa* tradition is associated with a tireless search for freedom through personal effort and means. The traditional *Śramaṇa* is the ascetic who lives on the outskirts of civilization" (Ranganathan 2008, p. 37). Yoga philosophy and practice has been traced still further back to the indigenous prehistoric culture of India in the Indus Valley civilizations. It has been argued that there were certain seals found at archaeological sites: "It is significant that one of these seals appears to depict a person in a specific yogic posture that some identify as *Mūlabandha āsana*" (Ranganathan 2008, p. 37).

Though yoga may have had pre-Vedic origins, it would be wrong to overlook the transformative influence of Vedic thinking on Yoga *darśana* and on Patañjali. The influence of Sāṅkhya, Jainism, the Vedas and Buddhism on Patañjali's thought has been well documented. In fact, the influence of Sāṅkhya on Yoga has led to the marginalization of Yoga as an independent system of philosophy (Zimmer 1951/2008, p. 280). However, there are significant philosophical differences between the two schools, which are philosophically relevant to the argument concerning the influence of Patañjali's central moral ideas on Gandhi. There are also significant similarities between the Jains and Patañjali, in that the Jains place great emphasis on the *Mahāvrata*s or great vows. As Jainism predates Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra*, it can be safely argued that "Patañjali's formulation of the *yama* rules shows the influence of Jain thought" (Ranganathan 2008, p. 57). Consequently, one can argue that Gandhi's commitment to *yama* and *niyama*, while it drew on Jainism through Rajchandbhai Ravjibhai Mehta (the Jain mystic and philosopher), also came from Gandhi's own reading of Patañjali. This was not intellectually disruptive but a

continuous reading as Patañjali's own formulation of *yama* and *niyama* was influenced by the Jain *mahāvrata*s. It can also be argued that there was some influence of Buddhism on the Yoga system as it was from the Buddhist tradition that Patañjali initially derived the concept of the final state of the liberated soul as *dharmameghasamādhi*, or "the rain cloud of morality liberating state of absorption" (Ranganathan 2008, p. 299; Zimmer 1951/2008, pp. 282–283). To admit the diverse philosophical influences on Patañjali, however, should not be taken as a denial of his originality. It would be wrong to consider Patañjali as philosophically beholden to any of the great traditions that predated him as there were also several significant differences between these traditions and Yoga. In this context, one can note that the differences between Patañjali and the Jains arose perhaps from the former's deference to Vedic authority. From the Vedas, Patañjali drew both the commitment to *ṛta* or *dharma* (as the moral law governing nature and all reality) and the theistic belief in a God or *Iśvara*.

The relationship between the Yoga and the Sāṅkhya systems of philosophy has led most commentators on Indian philosophy to take them as a single system. Both the *Sāṅkhya kārikā* and the *Yoga Sūtra* take the world to be made up of two different realities *puruṣa* (ātman, soul, person) and *prakṛti* (nature). Both agree that the *puruṣa* is of the nature of pure consciousness. Both agree that there is a plurality of *puruṣas.* In contrast, *prakṛti* is only one but composed of three types of qualities/ *guṇa*s: *sattva* (luminosity), *rajas* (action) and *tamas* (stillness). Yoga and Sāṅkhya agree that these three qualities which comprise the totality of all things in the natural world contribute to the individual's liberation. They help to bring about a discrimination between the essence of the *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* after which liberation occurs. Both schools also accept that the mind, intellect and other mental faculties are a part of *prakṛti* and distinct from the *puruṣa.* Thus, for the *Sāṅkhya kārikā*s and the *Yoga Sūtra* every *puruṣa* stands by a bundle of nature, which changes over time.

According to some scholars, despite these similarities, there are important differences between the Yoga and the Sāṅkhya systems of philosophy and treating them as one has been detrimental to a fuller understanding of the *Yoga Sūtra* (Ranganathan 2008, p. 51; Whicher 2008, p. 162; Chapple and Kelly 1991, p. 5). While a detailed discussion of the differences between the *Sāṅkhya kārikā*s and the *Yoga Sūtra* is beyond the scope of this work, there is some reason for a brief discussion of the main differences and of Patañjali's specific contributions to Indian ethics. For one, the Gandhi–Tagore debate focused upon Gandhi's vows or *"vratas*" and on his insistence on *tapas* (the Gandhian practice of *tapas*/austerity—dietary austerities, *satyagraha* and fasting) on which little philosophical attention has been paid. Gandhi appeared to have been influenced by his readings of the *Yoga Sūtra*, as an independent philosophical work, in forming conceptions of the role played by vows and *tapas*/austerity in the moral life, and of truth both as a goal/ *telos* and as a virtue of character. It may be noted that Gandhi's many references to Patañjali and the *Yoga Sūtra* treat Yoga as an independent system. Hence, Gandhi frequently refers to Yoga *darśana* and not to the Sāṅkhya-Yoga *darśana*. It is possible that drawing out the differences between Sāṅkhya and Yoga can help to locate the philosophical lineage of Gandhi's central moral notions in Yoga morality.

The word "Sāṅkhya" means "enumeration", while "Yoga" comes from "*yuj*" which means "to yoke". This emphasizes the importance of reasoning in bringing the *puruṣa* to liberation in Sāṅkhya. In sharp contrast, in most contexts of Indian philosophy, Yoga has been associated with mental and physical discipline as the means to liberation/freedom. One of the most important differences between Sāṅkhya and Yoga follow from here. This is that while Sāṅkhya believes that *puruṣa*s are purely passive, Yoga assumes that the *puruṣa*s are active agents. There is a celebrated stanza in the *Sāṅkhya kārikā*s, which brings out the non-agency view of the *puruṣa* held by classical Sāṅkhya: "It is clear that no one is ever bound, no one is ever liberated, nor does anyone transmigrate; it is nature (*prakṛti*) assuming many forms that is bound, is liberated, and transmigrates" (*Sāṅkhya kārikā*, quoted in Ranganathan 2008, p. 52).

As against this there are no statements attributing a non-agency view to the *puruṣa* in the *Yoga Sūtra*. On the contrary, Patañjali clearly affirms that the *puruṣa* is the "master of the character of the mind" (*YS* 1 V.18, quoted in Ranganathan 2008, p. 53). The object of Yoga is to control the moral character of thought (*YS* 1.2 in Ranganathan 2008, p. 53) which results in a person abiding in its essence (*YS* 1.3 in Ranganathan 2008, p. 53). Yoga requires constant effort by the individual moral aspirant as it accomplishes the control of the mind, which results in liberation/freedom from *prakṛti*.

Another difference between the two systems is, what or rather who, might be construed to be the recipient of liberation/freedom. Sāṅkhya is clear that it is *prakṛti*/nature itself which is bound, transmigrates and is liberated. That is, it is the subtle body (*linga śarira* made up of the mind, *saṃskāra*s/psychological dispositions, etc.), which is bound and liberated and not the *puruṣa*/self. Sāṅkhya affirms that the *puruṣa*s cannot act. As pure passive witnesses they cannot change so they are neither bound nor liberated. All *puruṣa*s are eternally free. Only, they do not realize their freedom due to the ignorant nature of the mind, which is itself a product of *prakṛti*. The engagement of the free *puruṣa* with nature is only an apparent engagement. Discriminating knowledge, suddenly and simply, reveals the true nature of the *puruṣa*. This perspective is alien to the *Yoga Sūtra* which regards bondage (*saṃyoga*) and liberation (*kaivalya*) as distinct events that happen to the *puruṣa*/self (*YS* in Ranganathan 2008, p. 54).

Another important difference between the views of the two schools arises from their individual understandings of the relationship between morality and liberation/spiritual freedom. A related point is whether the liberated soul continues to have an embodied existence. In other words is *jīvan mukti* possible? It is clear that Sāṅkhya accepts a radical dualistic closure in interpreting liberation as the absolute separateness of *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*. There is complete cessation of the connection between the *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* in liberation, which can only be interpreted as a disembodied state implying death of the physical body. According to this view, there is no significance of morality in the state of liberation as the *puruṣa* ceases to have any connection with *prakṛti* and other *puruṣas*. Liberation itself is directly brought about by discriminative reasoning (*Sāṅkhya kārikā*, 44–45, 63–64 quoted in Ranganathan 2008, p. 55). Consequently, the role of ethics seems severely

limited in the *Sāṅkhya kārikās*, which regards morality merely as a device for *karmic* betterment to get improved births. One can argue that on this view the moral life, is itself, a form of bondage for the *puruṣa*/self.

The position seems significantly different in Yoga where morality occupies an important place in the life of the individual seeking self-knowledge. First, Yoga does not rest content with theoretical knowledge and it is committed to moral practice in the form of the *aṣṭāṅga* yoga (eight-membered path). The first two members of *aṣṭāṅga* yoga are the traditional *yama niyama*, which were accepted by the Jains who had predated Patañjali. (Gandhi it may be recalled, argued, that following the *yama/niyama* was the means to true self-rule/*swarajya*.) These are followed in Patañjali's *aṣṭāṅga* yoga by *āsana, prāṇāyāma, pratyāhāra, dhāraṇā, dhyāna* and *samādhi.* Second, the significance of *ṛta*, that is a moral order in the natural world, of cosmic balance and of the mutual support, upholding various parts of nature and society are important to the *Yoga Sūtra*. Vyāsa in his commentary on the *Yoga Sūtra* (Whicher 2008, p. 163) deals with the theory of "nine causes" (*nava kāraṇāni*), or types of causation, according to tradition:

> The ninth type of cause is termed *dhṛti*-meaning 'support' or 'sustenance'. Based on Vyāsa's explanation of *dhṛti* we can see how mutuality and sustenance are understood as essential conditions for the sustenance of the natural and social world. There is an organic interdependence of all living entities, wherein all … work together for the 'good' of the whole and for each other (Whicher 2008, p. 163).

This is a far cry from the absolute separation in liberation demanded by the Sāṅkhya. Lastly, liberation in Yoga is described as *dharmamegahasamādhi*/the cloud of *dharma samādhi*. It has been argued that in this state of liberation:

> …the mind and actions are freed from misidentification and affliction and one is no longer deluded/confused with regards to one's true form (*swarūpa*) or intrinsic identity. At this stage of practice the yogin is disconnected (*viyoga*) from all patterns of action motivated by the ego. According to both Vyāsa and the sixteenth century commentator Vijñāna Bhikṣu, one to whom this high state of purification takes place is designated as a *jīvanmukta*: one who is liberated while still alive…. (Whicher 2008, pp. 165–166)

Thus from this account of liberation and the means to liberation, it seems apparent, that morality is central to the Yoga system. According to Yoga, "… morality reveals the nature of the *puruṣa*: in constraining our natural constitution to be moral, we allow the body and mind to reflect the *puruṣa*'s true nature and for the *puruṣa* to have self-knowledge. Hence morality is essential to live authentically as a person, in Patañjali's account" (Ranganathan 2008, p. 55).

A distinctive contribution made by Patañjali appears to have been this emphasis on the centrality of morality to a *properly* human life. Unlike Sāṅkhya, and like the Jains, Patañjali regards moral perfection as the *telos* of individual life. Liberation/ spiritual freedom is nothing but the rain cloud of morality or a state of moral perfection which reinstates the self in its true nature. However, unlike Jainism (which regards material existence as an impediment to authentic existence and liberation), Patañjali regards embodied existence or *saṃyoga* (the tying of the *puruṣa* with nature), as possibly perfectible and as giving the *puruṣa* a unique

opportunity for liberation from a sense of ego/*asmitā* which comes from misidentification with its natural apparatus. Indeed, according to Yoga philosophy, in order for liberation to take place at all, there needs to be embodied existence, or what Patañjali calls *saṃyoga*/conjunction of the *puruṣa*/true self with nature/*prakṛti* to provide an opportunity for self-knowledge through Yoga. As a theist, he holds that the personal progress towards such liberation or true freedom cannot be made without the grace of God or *Īśvara*. However, just as Patañjali's God is not the creator of the universe so too the path to liberation cannot happen solely by his grace. It centres on the individual's progress to the authenticity of moral self-consciousness. The natural world is governed by *ṛta* or the moral law. It follows that sustenance and mutual support is the reality of the natural and social order. Having achieved *prajñā* that is "truth-bearing" insight (*ṛtambharā*), the adept perceives the natural/moral order (*ṛta*) of cosmic existence, unites with and embodies that order: "*ṛtambharā tatra prajñā*" (*YS* 1.48 in Ranganathan 2008, p. 124).

To fail to see clearly (*adarśana*) is to fall into disorder, disharmony and conflict with one self, and the world. *Kaivalya*/liberation in Yoga does not involve an "aloneness" as in an isolation of the seer but seems to refer to:

> …the 'aloneness' of the power of 'seeing' (YS 11.2, 25) in its innate purity and clarity without any distortion or moral defilement…. Through clear 'seeing'(*dṛśi*) the purpose of yoga is fulfilled, and the yogin, free from all misidentification and impure karmic residue (as in the former contextual sphere of *cittavṛtti*), gains full, immediate access to the world. By accessing the world in such an open and direct manner, in effect 'uniting' (epistemologically) with the world the yogin ceases to be encumbered by egoism (i.e. *asmitā* and its egoistic attitudes and identity patterns)…. (Whicher 2008, p. 167)

If one recalls Gandhi's preoccupation with truth as the goal of the moral life, it becomes interesting to note that Yoga lays much emphasis on *prajñā* as truth-bearing insight, which is free of the distortions of the ego. It is also interesting to note, especially so in the context of Gandhi's emphasis on man's *swabhava* (or innermost self as essentially non-violent), that for the Yoga system *puruṣa*s in their true nature are morally perfect and incapable of moral error that involves harm to others. Further, it is significant that the importance of morality for liberation/spiritual freedom and the centrality of the *yama/niyama* in Patañjali comes from the idea that knowledge is always mediated. For Patañjali, it is impossible for the *puruṣa*s to know themselves. *Puruṣa*s can only know themselves through the mediation of nature, which creates a mind for them that acts like a mirror. When the mind has been restrained and thereby rendered in the image of the *puruṣa*/self, the self can recognize itself, and abide in its own essence. However, in order for the mind to be able to take the shape of the *puruṣa* it must be stilled and be made morally perfect. This requires for the body and for its actions to be morally perfect as well: "Liberation thus comes about by the *puruṣa* being able to *abide* in its essence, that is, abide in a natural habitat that displays its essence of moral perfection, purity and luminescence" (Ranganathan 2008, p. 60).

The picture of the self which emerges from the brief consideration of Yoga is that moral excellence is the natural state of the self. Further, such excellence can be

achieved by the self/*puruṣa* by progressing towards a form of personhood that masters the ego associated with individual mind and body of a person. Moral excellence consists precisely in the possibility of individual progress to such a form of personhood free from the distortions caused by the individual ego. The achievement of an authentic form of personhood depends on the individual's ability to practise the specified virtues, austerity, bodily exercises and meditation with a view to discipline the mind and purify the body so that the ego comes under control and its mistaken patterns of identification are stilled. This process culminates in the insight into reality as it is, significantly free from egoistic concerns or an inflated sense of self/*asmitā*.

It is possible to argue that Gandhi central moral ideas were considerably influenced by his readings of the *Yoga Sūtra*. Gandhi found an intellectual resource in Patañjali and this was reflected in his list of virtues, the primacy he accorded to the practice of *ahimsa*, the centrality of *tapasya* and the insistence on bodily purity. There are two important moral arguments in Gandhi's writing that seem to bear out the influence of Yoga on his life and thought. First, there is the oft-quoted Gandhian connection between *ahimsa* (non-harming) and *satya* (truth). To interpret this connection, it is important to note that Gandhi had often emphasized that a significant sense of *ahimsa* is humility. Gandhian *ahimsa* as humility was an important part of the discipline to control egoistic identity patterns in the individual's mind and thereby help her to see things as they really are or attain truth. This central moral insight about the connection between *ahimsa* and truth/realism can perhaps be traced to Patañjali's belief that for the *puruṣa* to develop a vision free of distortions, the individual body and mind must be purified of the obstructions caused by the powerful sense of an "I". This point can also find support from Gandhi's admission that his conception of *ahimsa* was influenced by Patañjali. Second, Gandhi's emphasis on *tapasya* and austerity, as the means to discipline the body and thereby take the mind progressively closer towards truth, seemed to be powerfully influenced by the Yoga system and its preoccupation with penance and bodily purity.

2.2 Truth/God, Freedom and Love: Central Gandhian Insights

Gandhi's return to the past took the form of an engagement with India's philosophical tradition and with at least two classical texts: The *Bhagavad Gītā* and the *Yoga Sūtra*. However such a return was not in the form of a revivalist reiteration of traditional categories like *mokṣa*. Gandhi's return was the expression of a need to take tradition seriously (as an intellectual resource) for a rethinking of what it meant to be free and how individual Indians could reconstitute an authentic form of personhood. Since Gandhi was not a revivalist it is not possible to interpret his moral ideas solely in terms of a reiteration of tradition. Taking this as the key

insight about Gandhi (in this section), I will move away for the moment from Patañjali and make a conceptually independent attempt to reconstruct Gandhi's central moral insights.

It is only if Gandhi's philosophical insights into the moral life can be systematically reinterpreted that it can become clear if there were any significant influences of Yoga on such insights. Three conceptions which are important to such a reinterpretation are truth/goodness, non-violence/love and freedom/moral self-mastery. Significantly, in *The Sovereignty of Good*, Iris Murdoch argues that a satisfactory moral philosophy ought to pay attention to variants of just these three concepts. Therefore, I will begin this section by talking about that argument.

Murdoch (in an argument which is important to understanding the history of moral philosophy) points out that certain predominant existentialist behaviourist positions in modern moral philosophy are deeply "unsatisfactory" (Murdoch 1970, p. 1). According to Murdoch, there is as a matter of fact a "void in present-day moral philosophy" (Murdoch 1970, p. 45). Inasmuch as the focus of moral existentialist behaviourist positions are overt actions which though obviously important in themselves are "…important too because they are the indispensable pivot and spur of the inner scene" (Murdoch 1970, p. 42). Consequently (in present day moral philosophy) certain "facts" which seem

> …to have been forgotten or 'theorized away' are the fact that an unexamined life can be virtuous and that love is a central concept in morals. Contemporary philosophers frequently connect consciousness with virtue and although they constantly talk of freedom they rarely talk of love. But there must be a relation between these latter concepts (Murdoch 1970, p. 2).

Murdoch's argument identifies three concepts, which seem to her central to any adequately comprehensive moral philosophy—goodness/realism, love and freedom. It is the interrelationships between these three that reveals "…that reflection rightly tends to unify the moral world… (1970, p. 56).

Gandhi's fundamental moral insights can be understood as philosophically centred around versions of just these three concepts. One may recall that Sorabji has recently argued that one of the reasons that make it possible to describe Gandhi as a philosopher was that the topics he discussed were "…well-known examples of philosophical topics, traditionally handled by philosophers." (Sorabji 2012, p. 196). Another reason is that Gandhi discussed such topics with "philosophical acumen" (Sorabji 2012, p. 196), offering philosophical reasons for what he believed. In this context, it is important to note here that Gandhi constructed philosophical arguments (though not so well articulated) to explain the interrelationships between goodness/realism, love and freedom in individual moral life. This may lend support to the point that though Gandhi was not an academic by profession he had given philosophic reasons for his moral beliefs that could perhaps fill the conceptual "void" (Murdoch 1970, p. 45), which Murdoch has identified in modern moral philosophy. Gandhi's attention to moral arguments in Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra* may also correct the impression that he was completely innocent of philosophy. This section (as already mentioned) will reconstruct moral arguments present in Gandhi's writing.

To this end, it will be useful to briefly examine Murdoch's argument as a sort of philosophical starting point. She recreates the typical image of the sort of man who is at the centre of modern moral philosophy. The kind of examined life which such philosophy celebrates is that of Hampshire's "ideally rational man" (Murdoch 1970, p. 6) who "…would be aware of all his memories as memories. His wishes would be attached to definite possibilities in a definite future … He would … find his motives for action in satisfying his instinctual needs within the objectively observed features of the situation" (Murdoch 1970, p. 6). Murdoch argues that the image presented by Hampshire is behaviourist, existentialist and utilitarian in a sense which unites all three:

> It is behiorist in its connection of the meaning and being of action with the publicly observable, it is existentialist in its elimination of the substantial self and its emphasis on the solitary omnipotent will, and it is utilitarian in its assumption that morality is and can only be concerned with public acts. (Murdoch 1970, pp. 8–9)

The problem with contemporary moral philosophy—with empiricism in modern ethics, with behaviourism and existentialism—is identified by Murdoch in the following way: "Briefly put, our picture of ourselves has become too grand, we have isolated, and identified ourselves with, an unrealistic conception of will, we have lost the vision of a reality separate from ourselves …" (Murdoch 1970, p. 46). Consequently, Murdoch constructs the specific problem with present-day moral philosophy as follows:

> The problem is to accommodate inside moral philosophy, and suggest methods of dealing with the fact that so much of human conduct is moved by mechanical energy of the egocentric kind. In the moral life the enemy is the fat relentless ego. Moral philosophy is properly and in the past has sometimes been, the discussion of this ego and the techniques (if any) for its defeat (Murdoch 1970, p. 51).

Murdoch suggests that freedom is a "moral concept" (Murdoch 1970, p. 37) and not "just a prerequisite of morality" (Murdoch 1970, p. 37). Individual freedom is not "the sudden jumping of the isolated will in and out of an impersonal complex" (1970, p. 23), but the result of the attempt to get away from the "dazzling" (1970, p. 30) object that is the self and to "see clearly" (1970, p. 23). Freedom is and must be connected with "the idea of knowledge" (1970, p. 37). The other, central moral concept is goodness and Murdoch is clear that "…it is perfectly obvious that goodness is connected with knowledge … with a refined and just perception of what is really the case…" (1970, p. 37). "'Good': 'Real': 'Love': These words are closely connected" (1970, p. 41) For the chief enemy of excellence or of virtue in morality is "…personal fantasy: the tissue of self-aggrandizing and consoling wishes and dreams which prevents us from seeing what is there outside one" (1970, p. 57). The connection between goodness and the real is clear once there is Murdoch's metaphor of vision, but one can ask where love fits into this understanding of morality? Murdoch says that the only way to see clearly and to escape ego and self-preoccupied fantasy is "attention" (Murdoch 1970, p. 33). This word, taken from Simone Weil, expresses "the idea of a just and loving gaze directed upon an

individual reality" (1970, p. 33). It is the characteristic of this loving gaze that it be "detached" (1970, p. 67). The exercise of *detachment* involved in this sort of love is a moral discipline of non-appropriation. Persons and things "can be looked at and loved without being seized and used, without being appropriated into the greedy organism of the self" (1970, p. 64). The three primary concepts in a satisfactory moral philosophy and moral psychology are the good/the real, love and freedom. "It is in the capacity to love, that is to see that the liberation of the soul from fantasy consists" (1970, p. 65).

However, to move from goodness as "the idea of realism" to goodness as "the idea of transcendence" (Murdoch 1970, p. 58) is a long step. Murdoch connects the idea of transcendence with "perfection (absolute good) and necessary existence" (1970, p. 60). In order to be able to grow in one's knowledge of value concepts and progress towards seeing the real "attention" needs to be altered and purified: "Good is the focus of attention when an intent to be virtuous co-exists (as perhaps it always does) with some unclarity of vision" (1970, p. 67). A transcendent object like the Good becomes necessary in a world without God "…something with, as it were, a metaphysical position but no metaphysical form" (1970, p. 71). According to Murdoch, the task of moral philosophy itself should involve "the provision of rich and fertile conceptual schemes which help us to reflect upon and understand the nature of moral progress and moral failure…" (1970, p. 43).

I have found it useful to recapitulate some of Murdoch's arguments here, for Gandhi's reflections on morality could be philosophically relevant to the task of moral philosophy so conceived. The concepts of truth/*satya*, love/*ahimsa* and freedom/*swarajya* can be said to be central to Gandhi's conception of moral self-consciousness. In what follows I will attempt to philosophically reinterpret these concepts as well as to examine Gandhi's arguments explaining the interrelationships between them. One can begin by saying that Gandhi saw the individual moral life primarily in terms of a quest for the truth or God. This was essentially a quest which needed to be informed by the practice of the virtues of character conceived in accordance with the *yama*s and *niyama*s, which were the central moral notions in traditional schools of Indian philosophy. It may be recalled that *satya*/truth was also one of the *yama*s to which Gandhi referred frequently. Therefore, it is possible to argue that Gandhi seemed to have used "truth" in a dual sense—first, as the proper end of human moral endeavour; that is, as a sort of Aristotelian *telos*, or the good at which moral life is properly aimed. Without such a goal or "end" it might be said that the moral life would become episodic and lack the unity which helps to make sense of a good human life. Secondly, Gandhi also spoke of truth in another sense as one of the "cardinal … virtues" (Gandhi 1947, vol. 33, p. 448) and thereby as an inherent part of the quest for the truth *qua* the good as the transcendent object of all moral endeavour. Gandhi made this distinction explicitly: "For me truth is the sovereign principle, which includes numerous other principles. This truth is not only truthfulness in word, but truthfulness in thought also, and not only the relative truth of our conception, but the Absolute Truth, the Eternal Principle, that is God" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 42).

The most important Gandhian insight about morality was that truthfulness as a virtue of character was not only the means to, but constitutive of, truth/the good as the goal of moral life. That Gandhi indeed used truth in this dual sense would become clear when we consider that not only did he constantly refer to truth as a *yama*/virtue or disposition of character but in 1921 he made a statement changing from "God is Truth" to "Truth is God": "You will see the fine distinction between the two statements, viz., that God is truth and Truth is God. And I came to the conclusion after a continuous and relentless search after Truth which began nearly 50 years ago" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 51).

It seems clear enough that for Gandhi Truth was the good or *sumum bonum* of the individual moral life. Gandhi was using "Truth" in the unambiguous sense of a transcendent object, which gave a sense of direction to individual moral life. This also becomes clear by his use of both "perfection" and "certainty" in connection with Truth/God. Gandhi believed that it is faith in the certainty of Truth as the end of the good life, which imparts a unity to individual moral endeavour. Such an endeavour could otherwise be fragmentary and plagued by the sense of the fragility and transience of ordinary human existence and its concerns:

> I think it is wrong to expect certainties in this world, where all else but God that is Truth is an uncertainty. All that appears and happens about is uncertain, transient. But … one would be blessed if one could catch a glimpse of that certainty and hitch one's wagon to it. The quest for Truth is the *summum bonum* of life (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 44).

A word about the notion of transcendence in connection with the good may be useful here. As G.E. Moore argued we can always ask of anything good, if it can be better than it is. One can say that the good is transcendent to any particular instance of goodness. It is perhaps in this sense that one can understand the idea that "good" is indefinable. Gandhi had a notion of the truth as involving not only certainty but perfection. Therefore the Absolute Truth was a perfect ideal to which human life could only aspire. One can say that for Gandhi truthfulness consisted in a sort of endless effort to overcome self-deceptions of many kinds. Therefore, it was always possible to be more truthful than one was. It certainly made sense to ask if one was being truthful enough. To be able to see things just as they are without any trace of self-deception could never be a settled or perfect human disposition. This is why Gandhi correlated truth with God as an ideal of moral perfection and as transcendent to individual moral life:

> Life is an aspiration. Its mission is to strive after perfection, which is self realization. The ideal must not be lowered because of our weaknesses or imperfections…. The silent cry goes out to Truth to help me to remove these weaknesses and imperfections of mine (Prabhu and Rao 2007, pp. 46–47).

The choice of "Truth" over God as the proper description of the ultimate object of human moral aspiration expresses the fundamental Gandhian insight that the central concept of human morality is knowledge or a certain realism. To be good is to be truthful, to "see" things, as they really are. Murdoch gives us an insight as to why it makes sense to connect knowledge/realism and goodness:

> I would suggest that the authority of the good seems to us something necessary because the realism (ability to perceive reality) required for goodness is a kind of intellectual ability to perceive what is true, which is automatically at the same time a suppression of the self. *The necessity of the good is then an aspect of the kind of necessity involved in any technique of exhibiting fact.* In thus treating realism … as a moral achievement, there is of course a further assumption to be made in the field of morals: that true vision occasions right conduct. This could be uttered simply as an enlightening tautology: but I think it can in fact be supported by appeals to experience. The more the separateness and different-ness of other people is realized, and the fact seen that another man has needs and wishes as demanding as one's own, the harder it becomes to treat a person as a thing (Murdoch 1970, p. 64).

It is possible that in taking Truth as the end of individual moral life Gandhi had an argument, which was fairly close to Murdoch's. It is apparent from the equation of truth with God that Gandhi connected truth or knowledge with the good as the goal of moral life. For Gandhi, truth or knowledge, primarily demanded a suppression of the self that is a progressive freedom from self-deceptions generated by the individual ego. This led him to argue that *ahimsa* was the chief means to Truth. Gandhian *ahimsa* (as humility and egolessness) was the appropriate method to achieve self-knowledge. Such knowledge was understood as an endless effort at realism. As Murdoch suggests, it is the "fat relentless ego" (Murdoch 1970, p. 51) which entrenches the individual self in "personal fantasy" (Murdoch 1970, p. 57). It is the central preoccupation of that ego to show the self in the best possible light and as so dazzling an object that all others seem inevitably to pale in comparison.

For Gandhi, like Murdoch, the good human life involved the self in a quest for knowledge or Truth. Gandhi made the assumption that truth/knowledge occasions right conduct. These insights become most apparent when one looks at the connection between truth and non-violence/love in Gandhi: "*Ahimsa* is not the goal. Truth is the goal. But we have no means of realizing truth in human relationships except through the practice of *ahimsa.* A steadfast pursuit of *ahimsa* is inevitably bound to truth-not so violence" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 118).

The relevant argument which can explain why Gandhi connected truth with *ahimsa* can be stated simply as the impossibility of arriving at true knowledge of self or other without cultivating the virtue of *ahimsa* as non-violence or love. To begin to understand this connection, one should note that in Gandhi *ahimsa* was a fairly extensive ethical discipline. Though it involved right conduct as non-injury in word, thought and deed, it could not be taken only as an external observance of non-violence/non-killing:

> Let us now examine the root of *ahimsa*. It is utter-most selflessness. Selflessness means complete freedom from a regard for one's body. If man desired to realize himself, i.e. Truth, he could do so only by being completely detached from the body, i.e. by making all other beings feel safe from him. That is the way of *ahimsa* (Bose 1948, p. 155).

It is clear that for Gandhi it is because *ahimsa* involves humility that it can occasion right conduct towards others. It can certainly be understood that love is a moral emotion which has the power to displace the ego from the centrality of self-concern and put in its place the object of love, that is, the child, the parent, or the beloved.

Once the self is displaced, all self-centred emotions/passions which obstruct the knowledge of both oneself and others are likewise diminished. That is emotions like lust, anger, revenge, injustice and hate. It may be noted that *ahimsa*/non-violence effects this transformation both in the self-practising *ahimsa* and in the other confronted with it. It is important to emphasize that Gandhi credited Patañjali with this moral discovery: "*ahiṃsā-pratiṣṭhāyaṃ tat-sannidhau vaira-tyāghaḥ*[3] 'HATE DISSOLVES IN THE PRESENCE OF LOVE' (Patanjali yogadarshanam ii.35)" (Gandhi 1947, vol. 48, p. 327). Gandhi's argument that truth is connected to *ahimsa* as two sides of the same coin implied that once self-centred emotions were dissolved by humility, egolessness, and love there would be the moral achievement of an intellectual ability to "see" things as they are outside the patterns of appropriation directed by one's egoistic concerns.

Gandhi's use of love in connection with *ahimsa* may lead to the insight that perhaps Gandhi was drawing out the moral potential implicit in the idea of romantic love. Love as Gandhian *ahimsa* was different from romantic love in one significant aspect. A central characteristic of individual romantic love is an exclusive even fierce sense of possessiveness, which seems to bear traces of appropriation for the sake of the self. Even if that self who wishes exclusively to possess the loved one has lost the sense of ego vis-à-vis the loved one he/she certainly seems to have a sense of acquisitiveness and appropriation. It can of course be questioned if the acquisitiveness and appropriation involved in possessiveness is possible without a sense of oneself as the "dazzling" self who has the right to so appropriate the loved one. That is without some traces of a greedy egoistic self-concern. The kind of love that Gandhi spoke of as connected to the moral achievement of truth significantly involved freedom from the Greek vice of *pleonexia*, that is, of wanting more than one's share or acquisitiveness as such. This was clearly expressed by the other virtues in the *yama*s: *brahmacharya* (at best, sexual abstinence and minimally, chastity), *asteya* (non-stealing) and *aparigraha* (sometimes translated as non-possession but more appropriately as non-acquisitiveness). However, the conception of *ahimsa* itself as a *detached*, non-exclusive love of all creation involving humility and egolessness made it clear that freedom from acquisitiveness was a defining feature of this sort of love:

> Love and exclusive possession can never go together. Theoretically where there is perfect love, there must be perfect non-possession…. In actual life, we can hardly exercise perfect love…. So that perfection in love or non-possession will remain an unattainable ideal as long as we are alive, but towards which we must ceaselessly strive (Bose 1948, pp. 16–17).

It may be philosophically useful to go back to Murdoch at this point. Murdoch's use of "attention" (a just, loving gaze) seems fairly close to the Gandhian *ahimsa*. For Gandhi says:

[3] As Gandhi wrote the original Sūtra in Hindi the author has quoted the English translation of the Sūtra from Ranganathan's translation of the *Yoga Sūtra*. (Ranganathan 2008, p. 186). The rest of the quotation faithfully records Gandhi's own words.

> In its positive form, *ahimsa* means the largest love, greatest charity. If I am a follower of *ahimsa*, I *must love* my enemy. I must apply the same rules to the wrong-doer who is my enemy or a stranger to me, as I would to my wrong-doing father or son. This active *ahimsa* necessarily includes truth and fearlessness (Bose 1948, pp. 157–158).

One can accept that love (at the very least) makes it possible to direct attention outwards and to appreciate the other on his/her own terms. Once the self is suppressed there is less room for self-deception and it becomes easier to develop a just, loving attention in the interest first of truth, and then, of right conduct. This is perhaps why Gandhi connected *ahimsa* with humility which was primarily understood as a reduction of the sense of self: "I must reduce myself to zero. So long as one does not of his own free will put himself last among his fellow creatures, there is no salvation for him. *Ahimsa* is the farthest limit of Humility" (Bose 1948, p. 8).

One can say that Gandhi's understanding of the moral life came fairly close to Murdoch's as he too related knowledge with goodness. This argument can find support from another somewhat unlikely source—Gandhi's choice of the literary genre of autobiography, fairly uncommon in Indian writing, and his use of the style largely as an exercise of self-study/scrutiny. The title of the self-narration of his life story, *An Autobiography, or The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, can bear out Gandhi's belief that an individual moral life was an endless quest for truth/goodness understood as a freedom primarily from the predominance of the ego and related deceptions. It can be recalled that Patañjali in Book 2 of the *Yoga Sūtra*, which is engaged with *sādhana/*means to self-knowledge, mentions three parts of such *sādhana/*: namely, *tapas*/austerity, *svādhyāya* and *Īśvara praṇidhāna*/contemplation of God. "'*Svādhyāya*' is a term that ambiguously stands for the study of the Vedas, and the study of the self" (Ranganathan 2008, p. 131). To study the self is to be introspective. In terms of Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra:* "It is an effort to discriminate between the true self and the contingencies of one's mind and body. To study the self, thus, is to take a critical stance towards one's mental life" (Ranganathan 2008, p. 132). One can argue that Gandhi's autobiography seems to be a reinvented form of *svādhyāya* as it is a sustained scrutiny of the *self* and an attempt to identify and check (critically) the intrusion of deceptions which prevent knowledge and distort goodness of character. In this context one can note that Gandhi made it clear that his choice of writing the autobiography was in itself a part of his search for truth: "I am not writing the autobiography to please critics. Writing it is itself one of the experiments with truth" (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol. 11, p. 418).

Gandhi clearly believed that writing *an Autobiography* was a part of his experiments with truth and he tried to use it as an opportunity for self-study (somewhat close to *svādhyāya* in the Yoga). It became a moral examination of himself and an effort to articulate before others (and thereby before himself) self-deceptions which could have confounded his assessments:

> I simply want to tell the story of my numerous experiments with truth, and as my life consists of nothing but those experiments, it is true that the story will take the shape of an autobiography. But I shall not mind, if every page of it speaks only of my experiments…. 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 power 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 (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol. 1, pp. xviii–xix).

Gandhi tried to identify deceptions and check the intrusion of ego inspired motives in his thoughts, evaluations and conduct. His telling of the story of his life had moments of the admission of the failure of truth which, paradoxically, seemed to show a triumph of self-knowledge and goodness. For instance, in connection with the Ahmedabad mill workers strike, Gandhi made the following admission:

> My fast was not free from a grave defect. For … I enjoyed very close and cordial relations with the mill-owners, and my fast could not but affect their decision…. Yet in spite of my knowledge that my fast was bound to put pressure upon them, as in fact it did, I felt I could not help it (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol. 11, p. 644).

It is clear that Gandhi's admission that the success of the fast did not come from the strength of his moral acumen or simply from the moral power of the principles of truth and *ahimsa* but from some simple fortuitous accident—a personal attachment—was part of relentless self-study.

Two of Murdoch's three central concepts have been important to Gandhi's understanding of morality. That is, truth/goodness and love/*ahimsa.* Freedom, the third, was also intimately connected with the first two in Gandhi. It may be recalled that for Murdoch it is in love that the freedom of the soul from fantasy consists. In the same spirit for Gandhi, *swaraj* was not merely political freedom or home rule but moral self-mastery. It may be recalled that Gandhi's equation of home rule with self-rule and the constant use of moral arguments in political and economic matters was deeply problematic to Tagore. However, one can philosophically interpret Gandhi as having made a connection between individual freedom and truth. For Gandhi, the primary meaning of individual freedom was freedom from the ego and related self-deceptions.

As early as 1909, Gandhi tried to articulate what "true" freedom for India meant and ought to mean. His central argument in *Hind Swaraj* was that political self-governance could only be based on an individual freedom understood as self-rule. "Real Home Rule is self-rule or self-control" (Parel 2009, p. 116). Parel, in his translation of this portion of the text notes that, "The Gujarati text reads: 'One's rule over one's own mind is real swaraj'. The mind, again, is shown to be the key faculty in Gandhi's ethics." (Parel 2009, p. 116, fn).

That Parel should make this point is interesting. For it can be argued that it is in the conception of *swaraj*/freedom as signifying the individual's rule over her mind, that some influence of Gandhi's readings of the *Yoga Sūtra* becomes apparent. Gandhi made a distinction between the mind and the self within:

> *Chit* and *chitta* are two different words, but the latter is derived from the former. *Chit* means consciousness, or it can be interpreted to mean that which can have consciousness, namely the *atman*. To say that the *chitta* of one who has overcome attachment is always serene and contented means that his *atman* is so. *Chitta* may also mean the mind. The word should be interpreted according to the context in the sentence or the verse in which it occurs (Gandhi 1947, vol. 59, p. 83).

One of the central assumptions in Patañjali was the distinction between *puruṣa*/true self and the individual's mind and body. For Patañjali, the ego is associated with the mind and body which belong to *prakṛti*. Control of the mind and body by the self/*puruṣa* using bodily austerity and ethical discipline restrains the ego and stills the mind. The self then appears in its benign compassionate nature and can know itself. However, for Patañjali, knowledge is always mediated and the *puruṣa* or soul can only have self-knowledge with the help of his/her mind and the body. According to this view, the prerequisites for such self-knowledge are that the body should be disciplined and the mind purified of egoistic passions and desires, so that both can reflect the inherent moral excellences of the soul. For Yoga such effort would take the individual towards true freedom from *prakṛti* or the material world.

Though Gandhi might certainly not have accepted the metaphysical assumptions of Yoga he used the metaphor of the *ātman*/soul and was influenced by the distinction between the mind and true self. It is possible to argue that Gandhi saw individual moral life as a struggle between the self as a form of personhood with a potential for progressive moral perfection (its true nature) and the powerful tendencies of the ego, which obstructed the inherently benign nature of that self. Gandhi can be philosophically interpreted as having equated the mind or *cogito* with the seat of the sense of ego and ego-generated desires, passions, and deceptions. In itself, this need not appear philosophically puzzling, given that Descartes made the *cogito* famous as the source of knowledge of an "I" as an individual existing thing. The individual self for Gandhi may not quite have been Patañjali's *puruṣa* but it was the self as it existed in truth just as it was—viewed apart—from egoistic and essentially distortive impulses. To be able see the self clearly, as not better than it is, and as not better than the "other", was to be free of deception. This knowledge of the self as it was in truth was individual freedom in Gandhi. "Bhagwan Patanjali has described yoga as control of the movements of the mind" (Yoga Sūtra 1 in Gandhi 1947, vol. 77, pp. 327–328). Gandhi refers to the same *Sūtra*, "*Yogah Chittavrittinirodah*—this is the first aphorism of Patanjali's Yoga *Darshan*. Yoga is controlling the activities of the mind. Restraining the surging passions, suppressing them,that is yoga" (Gandhi 1947, vol. 85, p. 256). It is in this context perhaps that we can understand Gandhi's idea of *swaraj* as control of the mind or self-mastery. Gandhi seemed to have taken self-mastery to mean the restraint of the egoistic impulses and deceptions emanating from the sense of an individual "I": "If we could erase the "I"s and "mine"s from religion, politics, economics, etc. we shall soon be free and bring heaven upon earth" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 5).

It can also be argued that Gandhi was influenced by another central idea in the *Yoga Sūtra*. This was Patañjali's understanding that self-knowledge is always powerfully mediated by the individual's mind and body. This influence becomes apparent from the fact that Gandhi frequently reiterated both Patañjali's belief in the need for purity of the body and his emphasis on the restraint of the mind. "True yoga is that which strengthens body, mind and soul, all the three" (Gandhi 1947, vol. 72, p. 411).

From the discussion above, it might seem apparent that Gandhi understood individual freedom primarily as a moral notion. In this context one can note that Ronald Terchek has argued that Gandhian *swaraj* was a sense of freedom close to the moral autonomy of the Western liberals but not quite that understood by Locke, Kant or Rawls (Terchek 2002). In my view, it can be said that there are two ideas which differentiate Gandhi's understanding of individual freedom from the conception of "moral autonomy" in Western liberalism. The first is that, though Gandhi did not conceive individual freedom in traditional terms, he could still be interpreted as being in continuity with central preoccupations of the Indian philosophical tradition. That tradition,it may be recalled, has understood the goal of individual life to be *mokṣa*/freedom i.e., the knowledge/realization of the self as it is in truth. (Of course, Gandhi considerably reinvented traditional understandings of the self, of truth and what it meant to be free.) The second point that differentiated Gandhi from Western liberals was that freedom as self-rule or Gandhian *swaraj* was not based on the priority of the right but on the priority of virtue. This then brings me to the centrality of the *yama*s *niyama*s in Gandhi as the means to truth and freedom.

2.3 The Priority of Virtue in Gandhi

2.3.1 The Yama/Niyama *as Gandhian Virtues*

> …even knowledge of the self within presupposes a pure heart, which in its turn depends on the practice of the *yamas* and *niyamas*—the cardinal and casual virtues… (Gandhi 1947, vol. 33, pp. 447–448).

A footnote provided by Gandhi in this text clarifies that

> *Yamas*, the cardinal virtues, according to Yoga Shastra are: *ahimsa* (non-violence), *satya* (truth) *asteya* (nonstealing) *brahmacharya* (celibacy), *aparigraha* (non-possession); and the *niyamas* or the casual virtues are, according to the same authority: *shaucha* (bodily purity) *santosha* (contentment) *tapa* (forbearance) swadhyaya (study of scriptures) *Iswarapranidhana* (resignation to the will of God) (Gandhi 1947, vol. 33, pp. 447–448).

There have been many different and conflicting accounts of virtue in the history of moral philosophy in the West, e.g., in Homer and the heroic accounts of virtue in ancient Greece, Sophocles, Plato, Aristotle, *The New Testament,* Aquinas and medieval thinkers and later Western thinkers like Benjamin Franklin. Most of the ancient schools of Indian philosophy whether orthodox or heterodox (throughout their long histories) seem to have endorsed fairly similar accounts of ethical discipline. For the most part these accounts are close to the traditional *yama*s and *niyama*s accepted by the Jains and by Patañjali. In the acceptance of the *yama*s as "cardinal virtues" (Gandhi 1947, vol. 33, pp. 447–448), Gandhi expressed his appreciation of the role of tradition as an inherited set of values and an initial starting point in individual moral life. In that sense, it can be said that for Gandhi one could not take an entirely ahistorical view of the individual's moral life. There was a sense of respect for the tradition of inherited moral practices and virtues

which constituted the starting point of an individual's moral life as essentially socially embedded. Of course, the fact that Gandhi accepted that he had moral beginnings in an inherited tradition of moral practices and virtues should not be taken to mean that he accepted the limitations of the belief systems of the past. His quest for the good consisted in moving forward from those moral beginnings and reinventing the traditional and received understandings of moral concepts. However, Gandhi seemed fairly certain that in so moving ahead one could neither obliterate nor escape the moral inheritance of the past. This might well explain his hostility to conversion.

The importance of the past in Gandhi's account of the moral life was, in itself, a point of radical philosophical departure from Tagore. It could be said that Tagore negotiated his relationship to the good human life fairly independently of tradition. In *The Religion of Man*, Tagore had argued that "truth is in freedom" (Tagore 2005, p. 31). For "…free spirit alone is Godly and can claim kinship with God" (2005, p. 41). For Tagore, it was of utmost significance that an individual's moral endeavour for truth or self-realization could not be grounded in "unimaginative repetition of life" (2005, p. 41). Therefore, for him: "Every true freedom that we may attain in any direction broadens our path of self-realization, which is in superseding the self" (2005, p. 41) That an individual's moral beginnings need not necessarily come from the past becomes fairly clear from Tagore's insistence that man's moral life might begin (as did his) in "…freedom from the dominance of any creed that had its sanction in the definite authority of some scripture, or in the teaching of some organized body of worshippers" (Tagore 2005, p. 78).

It is possible to argue that Gandhi's interpretation of the *yama*s of the Indian tradition as "virtues" did not amount to (as Tagore thought such creeds did) an unimaginative repetition of the past. Gandhi expanded the meaning of the *yama*s and envisaged an altogether different relationship between them. To begin with, the Gandhian virtues, could not be conceived apart from their relationship to an "end" of moral life. That end/*telos* was not "God or Truth" but "Truth or God". Gandhi thought of the goal of moral aspiration primarily in terms of moral perfection understood as a clarity of vision free from the deceptions caused by self-assertion. Gandhi's equation of Truth with God made space in an individual's moral life, for the role of religious faith and for divine grace. However the fact that Truth, and not God, was the *telos* of individual moral life ensured that there was philosophical space to conceive such a life independently of religion. It can be said that in this one respect Gandhi's moral insights shared space with modernity and to that extent reinvented tradition. Inasmuch as the central philosophical task of moderns (from Kant onwards), was to be able to conceive morality independently of religion, Gandhi made space for religion within a morality that could be independently conceived as simply a search for realism and freedom from deception in individual life.

Gandhi's reinterpretation of the *yama*s as "virtues" (Gandhi 1947, vol. 33, p. 448) was in itself a philosophical reinventing. The classical Indian tradition seemed to have had no word parallel to the Greek *arête* which later comes to be translated as "virtue". The word commonly used for translating the *yama*s and

*niyama*s was *vratam. Vratam* appears to relate less directly to a disposition of character and more to an act of free will in taking a moral pledge. In the schools of Indian philosophy, *yama/niyama* had often been translated as vows. For instance, the *Ācārāṅga Sūtra* of the Jains refers to the *yama*s as the "five great Vows" (Müller 1895, vol. XVI). Gandhi also used the word "vow" in connection with the *yama*s and *niyama*s. However, it can be argued that for Gandhi, while the term "*vrata*/vow" enhanced the understanding of the *yama*s*/niyama*s*, vrata* was not an exact translation of *yama* and *niyama*. For Gandhi, *yama/niyama* referred to the "cardinal and casual virtues" (Gandhi 1947, vol. 33, p. 448). One can understand why Gandhi related the virtues to the taking of vows if one were to ask the question: "How should a moral aspirant be inculcated into a life of virtue?" A Gandhian answer would be by taking a vow to practise the virtue concerned: "To do at any cost something that one ought to do constitutes a vow" (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol. 1V, p. 249). In that sense, Gandhian virtues were *also* vows or rather one could cultivate virtues by taking vows that is, by strengthening the individual will to do the right thing. In Gandhi's understanding, it could be said that virtues themselves were not vows but were primarily those dispositions of character that were needed to develop the intellectual ability to "see" things and others clearly without the distortions caused by self-deception. In terms of Murdoch's argument one can say that, for Gandhi, the practice of virtues was a prerequisite to develop the proper "attention" to be able to really "see" things outside one's ego directed frameworks. Gandhi used the metaphor of vision for such "seeing". In this context, it may be recalled that Gandhi spoke of the absolute Truth as sharing the clarity and lustre of the sun.

Gandhi's use of the metaphor of the Sun appears philosophically reminiscent of Plato's allegory of the cave and the description of the ascent to the good as culminating in the vision of the good/the sun. Gandhi's understanding of Platonic thought appears to have been limited to *The Apology*. There is evidence that he had read this because in 1908 he published it in a six-part series in *Indian Opinion*. It was later published as a pamphlet with the title *Story of a Soldier of Truth*. One cannot be sure if Gandhi was familiar with the developed theory of the Platonic virtues in the *Republic* but he certainly used a version of the metaphor of the sun for the good or truth:

> The little fleeting glimpses, therefore, that I have been able to have of Truth can hardly convey an idea of the indescribable luster of Truth, a million times more intense than that of the sun…. In fact what I have caught is only the faintest glimmer of the mighty effulgence. But this much I can say with assurance, as a result of all my experiments, that a perfect vision of Truth can only follow a complete realization of ahimsa (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol. 11, p. 752).

While Gandhian *ahimsa* as love was most immediately relevant to the task of seeing things clearly without traces of self-deception the other virtues (as dispositions of character) such as truthfulness, non-stealing, non-acquisitiveness and *brahmacharya* also helped to direct attention away from the self and thereby broke

the power of self-deceptions. Both knowledge/truth and freedom were correlates to an understanding of Gandhian virtues. Perhaps Gandhi's conception of a "virtue" can be understood as fairly close to MacIntyre's definition:

> The virtues therefore are to be understood as those dispositions which will… sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good, by enabling us to overcome the harms, dangers, temptations and distractions which we encounter, and which will furnish us with increasing self-knowledge and knowledge of the good (MacIntyre 1981, p. 204).

As already noted, Gandhi interpreted such knowledge of the good *qua* truth as itself the *telos* of individual moral life.

For Gandhi, a question intimately related to the moral life and to virtue theory was: "How could an individual become at home in the practice of the virtues?" In this connection, it is important to note that Gandhi did not agree with the Socratic answer that "…virtue will be acquired neither by nature nor by teaching. Whoever has it gets it by divine dispensation…" (Plato, in Guthrie 1973). Gandhi was philosophically close to Patañjali's conviction that the individual will is central to moral endeavour. It is in this connection perhaps that Gandhi reinvented the traditional concepts of *vrata* and *tapas* as important to educating oneself and others into such a life of virtue. The next sub-section discusses the place of *tapas* in Gandhi's conception of moral education. However, before close this section, I will briefly examine the role of the Gandhian vows in inculcating a moral aspirant into the practice of virtue.

As his autobiography shows, Gandhi was all too aware of the difficulties of becoming comfortable in the practice of the virtues. It was in this context that he realized the usefulness of taking vows: "The taking of a vow does not mean that we are able to observe it completely from the very start; it does mean constant and honest effort in thought, word and deed with a view to its fulfillment" (Gandhi, *From Yeravda Mandir*, in Narayan 1995, vol. IV, p. 225). The Gandhian position on vows was (as already observed) a point of disagreement with Tagore. Tagore found the mindless conformity implicit in the idea of a *mantra*/vow to be positively against the notion of individual freedom. He argued against the "inertness of the mind" involved in the insistence of "a course of blind routine and habit" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 76). To him, vows had the sense of "…surrendering our greatest right—the right to reason and judge for ourselves—to the blind forces of *shastric* injunctions and social conventions" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 76).

However, one might argue in support of Gandhi that the usefulness of taking "vows" only indicated that the role of the individual's free will to live up to the virtues was critical in a good life. For it is only by her own free will that a person can take a vow. If Gandhi's moral aspirant was to develop the capacity for truth by becoming at home in the practice of virtue, her *own* effort to do the right thing was critically important. When Gandhi asked moral aspirants to take vows (like non-violence), he was not thereby recommending a mindless conformity to a law or moral rule but advising them to take the help of vows in order to strengthen their will and avoid the temptations, which prevented the practice of virtue. Taking vows to practice virtues could help the moral aspirant by motivating her to withstand

temptations and thereby overcome moral weakness: “I realized that in refusing to take a vow a man was drawn into temptation” (Gandhi, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, in Narayan 1995, vol. 1, p. 308).

To go back to Patañjali, it may be noted that *Sūtra* 31, Book 2 (*Sādhana-pāda*) of the *Yoga Sūtra* refers to the *yama* rules as *vratam*/vows. The *Sūtra* is as follows: “*jāti-désa-kāla-samayānavacchinnāḥ sārva-bhaumā mahāvratam*”. It has been translated thus: “This great duty (adherence to the *yama* rules) is to be followed throughout the world, irrespective of station at birth, country or place, time or custom” (*YS* 31, in Ranganathan 2008, p. 169). The use of the word *vrata* here has led to some controversy. Some commentators have argued that *vrata*/vow indicates voluntary compliance which would mean that the *yama* rules are not to be considered as universally obligatory but only as optional. However, the commentary on this *sūtra* suggests that Patañjali’s use of *vratam* refers to a universally obligatory ethics of voluntary compliance.

> For Patañjali *ought preceeds can.* It is only after we have recognized and affirmed our responsibility to universal obligations like the *yama* rules that we can gain the power to live up to them. In the absence of such an ability, it does not follow that the *yama* rules are not obligatory. Rather, it is because we have obligations that we cannot live up to that we must do something to correct our shortcomings (Ranganathan 2008, p. 174).

It seems possible to say that Gandhi’s understanding of the role of vows in the moral life is influenced by Patañjali’s use of ‘*vratam*’.

However, there was one other way by which the Gandhian aspirant could overcome moral weakness. This was by practising *tapas*/austerity and thereby strengthening the individual will to do the right thing.

2.3.2 *Gandhi: The “Great* Tapasvi”

As pointed out in the last sub-section of this chapter, there were two traditional moral concepts which played a fairly important role in Gandhi’s understanding of moral education (of oneself and others)—*vrata* and *tapas*. As *vrata* has already been discussed, one ought to look briefly at the other concept, *tapas*. Gandhi thought that *tapasya* could play a part in educating both oneself and others into a life of virtue. Interestingly, it was Tagore who recognized the significance of *tapasya* in Gandhi’s ethics. In the third phase of the Gandhi–Tagore debate in the 1930s, the Gandhian idea of *tapasya* became a subject of serious controversy between them. The *Harijan* of 10 June 1933 carried an editorial note on the significance of Gandhi’s third fast against the evil of untouchability. It was in this note that Tagore referred to Gandhi as the “the great *Tapasvi*” who had “courted death with the determination of equalizing the high and the low” (Bhattacharya 2008, p. 145). Interestingly, in a recent book, Veena Howard notes that Gandhi applied “his ascetic practices… to political purposes” (Howard 2013, p. 9). She also refers

to the connection made in religious traditions between self-control and higher spiritual achievements as a source of obtaining worldly/political power.

A word about "*tapas*" might be merited at this point largely due to the somewhat common and fairly problematic translation of the term as "self-suffering".'*Tapasya*' has had a long history in the Indian tradition, which has associated that term with a host of related meanings. The earliest reference to *tapasya* is in the *Ṛgvedā*. It has been translated by Monier-Williams as "pain, suffering". It might seem strange to say that Gandhi conceived of voluntary, self-inflicted suffering as a means of inculcating the self and the conflicting "other" into a life of virtue. This could seem strange because suffering has a sense of the involuntary associated with it. Pain can certainly be self-inflicted (as happens in the practice of austerity or even of *hatha* yoga), but suffering refers to a state of anguish in the soul which only the psychologically disturbed can inflict on themselves or others. I would like to suggest that when Gandhi spoke of *tapasya* as being the transforming factor in inculcating oneself/"others" into the practice of virtue he seemed to have used the word in a number of related senses- of austerity, penance, focusing of energy and self-purification. Not being a professional philosopher Gandhi himself often translated *tapas* in the common parlance of his times as self-suffering. However, a better sense of what he meant can come from actual contexts in which he used the term and from the history of the term in Yoga to which Gandhi frequently refers.

Howard has translated "*tapas*" as "(austerity; self-sacrifice)" (Howard 2013, p. xvi). There seems to be an important difference between the terms "self-sacrifice" and "self- suffering". For self-sacrifice is clearly a voluntary act whereas self-suffering/*dukha* is involuntary. Conflicting with the translation of *tapas* as "self-suffering" is the sense of *tapasya* one gets from the etymological meaning *tapa* which, in Sanskrit, means heat. Accordingly, through *tapasya* a yogi can "burn off" or prevent accumulation of negative energies thereby clearing a path towards a spiritual evolution. As mentioned earlier, Patañjali referred to *tapas* as part of the *sādhana* or practice of yoga. It is a part of the casual virtues or *niyama*s: "'*Tapas*' comes from the root '*tapa*', which mean, among other things, to cause heat, pain, discomfort. *Tapas* is thus the practice of austerities" (Ranganathan 2008, p. 131). What is today called *hatha* or *āsana* yoga is what Patañjali would have regarded as *tapas*. "This purportedly has the effect of reducing impurities in the body, and over time the yogi will thus naturally gravitate towards the *yama* rules" (Ranganathan 2008, p. 175).

Interestingly, the sense in which Gandhi used the term appears fairly close to Patañjali's sense of *tapasya* as being a part of self-purification and strengthening of the individual's will to be good. It can be recalled that Gandhi also shared Patañjali's sense of austerity in body and diet as useful in reducing impurities of the body. Numerous dietary experiments made by him were evidence of this influence. As Howard points out, *brahmacharya* was a part of the same process of the yogi's control of her individual mind and body: "Within the trajectory of renunciation of physical pleasures, celibacy is a means of loosening the bonds of the body and thereby, the material world" (Howard 2013, p. xv). However, it is apparent that Gandhi reinvented and considerably expanded the meaning of *tapas* from its moral

beginnings in tradition. In this context, I will make three points about Gandhi's use of *tapasya* in his understanding of individual moral life and of moral education.

First, *tapasya* was a constituent of Gandhi's conception of non-violence which was one of the traditional *yamas* in Indian philosophy. In this context, one should take note of Gandhi's insight that; "…I discovered in the earliest stages that the pursuit of Truth did not admit of violence being inflicted on one's opponent…" (Bose 1948, p. 17). So the "…vindication of Truth…" meant "…not… infliction of" pain on the opponent "but on one's self" (Bose 1948, p. 17). In this way, as a constituent of his idea of *ahimsa*/love, forbearance/*tapas* became the basis of Gandhi's use of fasting as a form of non-violent resistance.

Second, such *tapas* as austerity became a *method* of cultivating the virtue of *ahimsa* in *oneself.* In this connection, Gandhi argued that:

> …non-violent training must be of a different kind…. I am of opinion that it used to be given in the past and is even now being given in a haphazard way. The various exercises of Hatha Yoga are in this direction. The physical training given by means of these imparts among other things physical health, strength, agility, and the capacity to bear heat and cold. …My reference to Hatha Yoga is meant only with a view to showing that this ancient type of non-violent training still exists, though I know that there is room in it for improvement. I do not know either that the author of this science had any idea of mass non-violence…. The object of the various exercises was to strengthen and purify the body in order to secure control of the mind… as we are thinking of a non-violent army, that is to say of bringing into being a Satyagraha Sangh, we can but build anew accepting the old as our foundation (Gandhi 1947, vol. 79, p. 272).

Third, for Gandhi, *tapasya* as a form of penance for the sins of others became a mode of inculcating virtues in *others* specially children. In this respect, it functioned in a dual way. First, as itself a form of *ahimsa*/love it brought about a requisite change of heart in the young. Secondly, self-imposed voluntary penance helped in setting up examples for others to emulate in moral matters. While looking after the education of youngsters at the Tolstoy farm in South Africa, Gandhi noted that: "To develop the spirit is to build character…" (Gandhi, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, in Narayan 1995, vol. II, p. 504). At this point, he realized the efficacy of *tapasya* as a method of value education. When youngsters at the *ashram* made moral mistakes Gandhi felt that "…the only way the guilty parties could be made to realize my distress and the depth of their own fall would be for me to do some penance. So I imposed upon myself a fast for 7 days…" (Gandhi, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, in Narayan 1995, vol. II, p. 511). As a part of the individual's practice of love/*ahimsa* such fasting/*tapas* was at the same time an expression of the effort to diminish "…anger against the guilty parties…" (Gandhi, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, in Narayan 1995, vol. II, p. 511) and substitute it by "…a clearness of vision…" (Gandhi, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, in Narayan 1995, vol. II, p. 512). This made it possible to give the moral mistakes of others a non-distorted attention free from anger and hostility which are essentially characteristics of egoistic "attention". This active *ahimsa* could also potentially transform all others—whether students, opponents or truant followers. Gandhi was clear that in "…the training of the spirit… the exercise of the spirit

entirely depended on the life and character of the teacher" (Gandhi, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, in Narayan 1995, vol. II, p. 505).

The duty of taking responsibility for the moral faults of those for whom one was responsible as a leader or a teacher was intimately related to Gandhi's idea that moral education could be best accomplished by example.

2.3.3 Gandhi's Notion of Virtue and the Unity of a Good Human Life

Gandhi's understanding of the virtues and of becoming at home in their practice reveals that the virtues could only be practised as part of a unified life. Gandhi's emphasis on the unity of the virtues can be interpreted as referring to two things. One that like Plato, Aristotle and Aquinas (and unlike Sophocles) Gandhi believed that the virtues are not only compatible with each other but that they each require the presence of all. Second, Gandhi believed that a virtue is essentially a disposition, which is not to be manifested only in one type of social situation.

The unity of a virtue in the moral aspirant's life is only intelligible if individual life itself can be envisaged as a whole or integrated unity. It seems apparent that for Gandhi the good human life could only be one where the character provided the virtues with an adequate *telos*. In this sense, it can be said that Gandhi was certainly not a modern. This becomes apparent if one recalls that modernity partitions individual life into a variety of segments each with its own norms and modes of behavior. Work is divided from leisure, the private from the public and the personal from the political. Childhood and old age are distinct realms divorced from the rest of human life. Gandhi refused to partition an individual life into the moral and other areas. To him the only sense of practising a virtue came from its practice across an integrated human life.

Let us look at these two points in some detail. It is very significant that unlike what happens in Sophocles' tragedies, in Gandhi, the virtues do not come into conflict but are compatible across a good human life. This unity, it can be argued, comes from the fact that the Gandhian virtues are dispositions of character that take the moral life towards its *telos* as a freedom from self-deception, which is a state of knowledge or Truth. Since there is a teleological account of virtues, there is some overriding end which harmonizes the pursuit of the virtues in individual life. Gandhi made this argument explicitly:

> Therefore, we have the belief based upon experience, that those who would make individual search after truth as God, must go through several vows, as for instance, the vow of truth, the vow of *brahmacharya* (purity)-for you cannot divide your love for Truth and God with anything else—the vow of non-violence, of poverty and non-possession. Unless you impose upon yourselves the five vows, you may not embark on the experiment at all (Bose 1948, p. 5).

One can argue that the Gandhian virtues are brought into a unity by the fact that they each derive their function in a human life from the common pursuit of the "end" of the good life as Truth or God. This last point, must incidentally act as a counter argument, to recent philosophical attempts to read elements of stoicism in Gandhi. As MacIntyre argues, when teleology (whether Aristotelian or Christian) is abandoned in accounts of virtue there is always a tendency to substitute for it some version of stoicism. If the virtues are not to be practised for the sake of some good, virtue has to be its own end, its own reward and indeed its own motive (MacIntyre 1981, p. 217). However, for Gandhi, the virtues are practised for an "end": that of moral realism and of seeing things without distortion. Gandhi's Truth can also be understood as God by the man of faith. Philosophical attempts to read stoicism in Gandhi fail to take note of this teleology in his account of virtue. One reason for such failure derives from the confusion arising out of the Gandhian argument, that means and ends, cannot be separated in the moral life. It should be emphasized that the inseparability of means and end (in Gandhi) only signifies that the *telos*/end of moral life cannot be adequately characterized at the start. One grows in the knowledge of it as one advances in the practice of virtues and thereby progressively overcomes temptations to act in contrary ways. The life of virtue as a means is inseparable from the goal of Truth which is its end. Yet, this inseparability of means and end should not be taken to mean that there is no end/goal of the moral life in Gandhi. *Ahimsa, brahmacharya, aparigraha,asteya* are practised, not for themselves, but to take the aspirant towards the *telos* which is Truth or God.

Gandhi argued that the practice of the virtues was not only unified because they were practiced for a common end but that there was a unity in the virtues in another sense, namely, that the practice of each involved the practice of all:

> Patañjali has described five disciplines. It is not possible to isolate any one of these and practice it…. It is well to bear in mind that all the disciplines are of equal importance. If one is broken all are…. Therefore it is essential that all the disciplines should be taken as one (Gandhi, "The Voice of Truth", in Narayan 1995, vol. VI, p. 133).

For Gandhi, the *yama*s were dispositions of character cultivated in order to help in directing the attention away from the ego and towards true knowledge of the self and the "other". The practice of each *yama* therefore involved the other *yama*s as clarity of vision was a complex achievement, which involved control of the individual's mind and body. If the powerful sense of "I" was to be subdued one could not be acquisitive and yet not steal, be truthful and yet indulge one's passions. To lie, indulge in one's passions, accumulate possessions, keep more than one needs are activities which strengthen the maintenance of an egoistic self-concern. The practice of each Gandhian virtue worked towards dismantling that self-concern. Therefore, the virtues were essentially part of a cooperative venture.

The second Gandhian insight into the unity of the virtues was that the practice of a virtue could not be segregated to some demarcated areas of human life. An integrated life was required to practice a virtue in any authentic sense. This seems easy enough to understand. For instance, if a person is to practise *brahmacharya* as a control of all his/her senses it seems apparent that he/she cannot take this to mean

only a ritual observance of celibacy. We might well understand his/her *brahmacharya* to be inauthentic if while remaining celibate he/she had a great interest in pornographic literature. We would find his/her *brahmacharya* all the more inauthentic if he/she were to argue that his/her profession was in the pornographic industry but in private life he/she was a celibate. If his/her character were to provide the practice of *brahmacharya* with an adequate *telos*, he/she would have to exhibit that virtue in a purity exhibited over an integrated life. This was the basis of Gandhi's refusal to make a division between the moral and the economic or political aspects of a good human life. This refusal, as already noted, was disturbing to Tagore. Gandhi made this sense of unity evident in many arguments about human life: "I do not believe that the spiritual law works on a field of its own. On the contrary, it expresses itself only through the ordinary activities of life. It thus affects the economic, the social and the political fields" (Bose 1948, p. 24).

2.3.4 Asteya Aparigraha *and* Brahmacharya

Before closing this discussion of the virtues in Gandhi, it might be useful to look in brief, at what he called "*yamas* the cardinal virtues" (Gandhi 1947, vol. 33, p. 448 fn). The traditional *yama*s as noted above were five. Of the fact that Gandhi extended the traditional meanings attributed to the first two of these, i.e. of *satya* as truthfulness and *ahimsa* as nonviolence, a lot has already been said above. I would like to say something here about the other three that is *asteya* (non-stealing) *aparigraha* (non-possession) and *brahmacharya* (purity/celibacy).

As with the first two Gandhi seemed to have extended the meanings of the other *yama*s. For instance *asteya* was not merely, taking without another's permission, that which belonged to him/her. It went "…very much farther. It is theft to take something from another even with his permission if we have no need of it" (Gandhi, *From Yeravda Mandir* in Narayan 1995, vol. IV, p. 227). Such theft may be considered as similar to physical theft. However: "There is besides another kind of theft subtler and far more degrading to the human spirit. It is theft mentally to desire acquisition of anything belonging to others, or to cast a greedy eye on it" (Gandhi, *From Yeravda Mandir*, in Narayan 1995, vol. IV, p. 228). Thefts could also be of ideas: "One who egoistically claims to have originated some good idea, which, really speaking, did not originate with him, is guilty of a theft of ideas" (Gandhi, *From Yeravda Mandir*, in Narayan 1995, vol. IV, p. 228). It is apparent that Gandhian non-stealing was a virtue connected with freedom from greed of all kinds. Greed seems straightforwardly related to egoistic self-concern. As the restraint of the individual practice of appropriating things, ideas and persons, for the sake of the self, non-stealing (in the extended Gandhian sense) was a part of the discipline to reduce the sense of ego at the centre of human life. It was also related to *aparigraha* in a fairly direct way. For it is acquisitiveness which is involved most directly in greed and in collecting things we do not really need. Gandhi himself made this connection: "Non-possession is allied to non-stealing. A thing not

originally stolen must nevertheless be classified as stolen property if we possess it without needing it" (Gandhi, *From Yeravda Mandir*, in Narayan 1995, vol. IV, p. 229).

Aparigraha was usually translated by Gandhi as non-possession but it is common for translators of the *Yoga Sūtra* to translate it as non-acquisitiveness. That also seems to capture the sense of what Gandhi meant by that term. In that sense, *aparigraha* would be freedom from the Greek vice of *pleonexia*, wanting more than one's share, or acquisitiveness as such. Gandhi seemed fairly clear that non-stealing already commits the aspirant to not desiring to possess more than he/she needs. Of course, a question that naturally arises at this point is simply, "What of things that one already has?' Gandhi clarified that one can practise *aparigraha* while possessing things (which one might already have) simply by giving up "…attachment to these things…" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 192). He clarified that; "You may have occasion to possess or use material things, but the secret of life lies in never missing them" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 192). If one is not acquisitive for the absorption of things into the greedy mechanism of the egoistic self, then one will not be attached to things, ideas or persons. Consequently, one can argue that the real sense of Gandhian *aparigraha* was not freedom from possession but freedom from acquisitiveness or a *desire* for things as such. That such acquisitiveness could indeed be the cause of much concentration on the self and moral failure is apparent enough: "How heavy is the toll of sins and wrongs that wealth, power and prestige exact from man" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 192). The origin of the economic doctrine of *trusteeship* from these two virtues in Gandhi is somewhat apparent.

Brahmacharya (though very much a part of the traditional *yama*s) was also much extended in a Gandhian use: "Mere control of animal passion has been thought to be tantamount to observing *brahmacharya*. I feel, that this conception is incomplete and wrong [sic]. *Brahmacharya* means control of all the organs of sense" (Gandhi, *From Yeravda Mandir*, in Narayan 1995, vol. IV, p. 222). There are two arguments which Gandhi constructed in connection with *brahmacharya,* which seem to be philosophically interesting. The first has to do with the contradiction between the pursuit of a progressive realism in moral matters, which demands a certain egolessness and the self-concern which seems at the centre of sense gratification. Truth directs a moral aspirant outward (away from self-concern) towards a clarity of vision that comes from a freedom from self-projection and related self-deceptions. It is only by giving up an egoistic interest in the self, as the centre of things, that one might see others and other things clearly for the first time. However, gratification of the senses (sexual or even connected to the palate) can be said to enhance self-concern. It puts the self right at the centre of things. Therefore, Gandhi said: "A man, whose activities are wholly consecrated to the realization of Truth, which requires utter selflessness, can have no time for the selfish purpose of begeting children and running a household. Realization of Truth through self-gratification should … appear a contradiction in terms." (Gandhi, *From Yeravda Mandir*, in Narayan 1995, vol. IV, pp. 219–220). Gandhi's insight into the contradiction between sense gratification and truth gets at the heart of the moral blindness of modernity, which is the cult of self-gratification. Though in the

recommendation of *brahmacharya* as a cardinal virtue, Gandhi seemed to have rejected the moral possibilities of family life, this would be a misinterpretation. For in his definition of *brahmacharya* Gandhi discusses the ideal practice of that virtue which (it is important to note) can only be realized in ordinary life as a progressive distancing from self-gratification and not in its ideal form.

The second argument is related to the possibilities/dangers of an extreme inwardness in sexual/romantic love. Gandhi argued that: "…*ahimsa* is impossible without utter selflessness. *Ahimsa* means universal love. If a man gives his love to one woman, or a woman to one man, what is left for all the world besides? It simply means, "We two first, and the devil take the rest of them" (Gandhi, *From Yeravda Mandir*, in Narayan 1995, vol. IV, p. 220). More recently, Howard suggests that it was through renouncing his "private pleasures" that Gandhi "sought to extend his love to his fellow human beings" (Howard 2013, p. xi). It is possible to philosophically reinterpret Gandhi's insights about *brahmacharya.* There *is* a sense in which a passionate love is established in a privacy of concern. Such privacy can create the sense of being invisible to the rest of the world and reciprocally also make the rest of the world invisible to those in the circle of love. This can create an extreme inwardness of attention which, by the nature of the case, would nurture self-deceptions. For one, in passionate love, the relationship in its exclusivity is reciprocally acquisitive for the sake of the magical self. Second, it distances all others—they may no longer remain objects of attention let alone of loving or *ahimsanat* attention. This has the possibilities of establishing moral aspirants in a life of progressive untruth. Gandhi expresses his insight that inwardness of passion can be contradictory to truth when he says "…it is clear that such persons cannot rise to the height of Universal Love, or look upon all mankind as kith and kin. For they have created a boundary wall round their Love" (Gandhi, *From Yeravda Mandir*, in Narayan 1995, vol. IV, p. 220).

Gandhi's account of virtues would be incomplete without noting his preoccupation with the presence of an "inner voice" or "voice of … conscience" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 32). This is important for various reasons. First, the persistent attention to an inner voice which guides the moral aspirant indicates the awareness that goodness is fragile and that there are frequent possibilities of making mistakes in moral matters. Secondly, both the stress on bad thoughts (one can recall Gandhi's experiments with *brahmacharya*) and conscience can be said to involve the awareness of the need for self-scrutiny. Self-study/scrutiny is an important part of being vigilant about potential self-deceptions, which can obstruct a clarity of vision. Being aware about bad thoughts as they arise indicates a seriousness about truth in moral matters. Third, the stress on self-study—on attention to bad thoughts and on cultivating an inner voice—might have been an important part of Gandhi's effort to safeguard the moral aspirant from another sort of egoistic self-deception, that of moral superiority over others. Note that in the introduction to his autobiography Gandhi had said: "I hope to acquaint the reader fully with all my faults and errors. My purpose is to describe experiments in the science of Satyagraha, not to say how good I am. In judging myself I shall try to be as harsh as truth, as I want others also to be" (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol 1, p. xxiii). Gandhi seemed aware that a

smugness in moral matters could obstruct an individual from seeing herself and "others" without egoistic self-concern.

It is apparent that self-awareness presupposes a persistent scrutiny of the self. Awareness of bad thoughts and the inner voice could well be reinvented forms of *svādhyāya* or the self-study advocated by Yoga. However, "bad thoughts" have also had a moral history in Christianity. They were identified by early Christians with, what the ancient Greek Stoics, had earlier called "pre-passions". By that term, the stoics had meant only an initial shock which occurs when your situation appears good or bad, but which still gives you time to avoid indulging in full-scale passion. The stoic Epicurus had pointed out "the *forward*-looking roles of conscience in *averting* wrongdoing or *reforming* past misconduct." (Sorabji 2012, p. 145). If one looks at the term "conscience" itself, it is interesting that the Greek expression literally meant "to share consciousness with oneself" but the concept grew beyond this. "In Greek playwrights of the fifth century BCE we find talk of sharing knowledge with oneself … of a defect or shortcoming, often but not always a moral one" (Sorabji 2012, p. 143). What Gandhi called the "inner voice" originally involved an awareness not of one's thoughts, but either of one's past faults, or what future faults to avoid. However, it also involved the awareness of what is positively right. One could say then that the Gandhian interpretation was consistent with the Christian *New Testament* where Saint Paul made a loose connection between conscience and the moral law written in men's hearts. However, Gandhi's concept of conscience as the inner voice seems to be closest to Plato's account of Socrates' belief in the *Daimonion*/inner voice. As already noted, Gandhi had serialized the *Apology* in 1908 (see Puri 2009).

To take note of Gandhi's emphasis on the inner voice is especially relevant to the task of this book, which is to make a philosophical examination of the Gandhi–-Tagore debate. For it appears evident that Gandhi's emphasis on listening to the "the 'still small voice within'" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 31) could provide a possible philosophical resource to safeguard Gandhi from Tagore's arguments regarding the possibilities of egoistic self-deception/untruth in his principles and movements.

It is clear that the differences between Tagore and Gandhi went much deeper than political or historical analysis can reveal. These differences arose from incompatible visions of what constituted a good human life. For Tagore, freedom was the most significant constituent of such a life. As I will argue (in Chap. 5 of this book), Tagore's conception of freedom seemed close to modern (primarily liberal) accounts of the individual's freedom to reason. For Tagore, the moral life could not be the foundation of individual freedom because to live a good human life itself required freedom from a "course of blind routine and habit" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 76) in a conformity to the past. In sharp contrast, Gandhi could not share this notion of freedom. Gandhian freedom was inextricably linked with knowledge/truth *qua* goodness. In a fairly important sense, Gandhi could not take a completely ahistorical view of the good human life; hence, the past was relevant to the present. The intellectual relationship between Gandhi's moral ideas and the *Yoga Sūtra* articulate this relationship to tradition, which is so important in

understanding Gandhi. Virtues were retrieved from tradition and reinvented. Gandhi's conception of individual *swaraj*/true freedom was a life dedicated to the virtues and made easier by taking vows and practising *tapas*. Perhaps the difference between Tagore and Gandhi can be put in terms of differently negotiated relationships to tradition and modernity. I will try, in the chapters that follow, to philosophically reconstruct the character of these negotiations.

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Chapter 3
Gandhi's Truth: Debate, Criticism and the Possibilities of Closure in Moral Arguments

Abstract This chapter examines Akeel Bilgrami's argument that Gandhi rejected universalizability, moral principles and criticism as incompatible with *ahimsa*. On this view, Gandhi was a relativist about truth and thought that truth was an exclusively moral notion. Gandhi's debate with Tagore poses a philosophical challenge to this interpretation. For that debate was about the truth of Gandhi's moral "principles" and Tagore's insistence on the individual's freedom to reject them. This chapter argues that Gandhi accepted criticism and believed in fundamental moral convictions which could be shared across religions even though exceptions were possible. Both Gandhi and Tagore thought of truth as both experiential and cognitive.

Keywords Akeel Bilgrami · Universalizability · Moral principles · Moral criticism · *Ahimsa* · Exemplar · Gandhi's truth · Relativist

The previous chapter reconstructed Gandhi's conception of the moral life as centred on the insight that human goodness/truth means that the self must not be too much with us. In 1921, Gandhi made a famous change from *God is Truth* to *Truth is God* (see Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 51). Truth was the *telos* of the individual moral life. Gandhi (as I have argued in Chap. 2) understood truth in terms of a progressive aspiration towards individual moral perfection conceived as a clarity of vision free from egoistic self-deceptions. Though his equation of Truth with God made space for religious faith in moral life, the fact that Truth and not God was the *telos* made it possible for Gandhi to conceive moral life independently of religion. One can say that Gandhi made space for religion within a morality that could be independently conceived simply as a search for realism and a freedom from deception in individual life.

As brought out in Chap. 2 of this volume, Gandhi had accepted the traditional *yama/niyama* which had been endorsed for the most part by both the orthodox and heterodox schools of Indian philosophy. These he called virtues rather than *vrata*s (as they had been designated for instance by the Jains). He related the practice of virtue to the individual quest for truth. It is important not to lose sight of the Gandhian insistence on truth as the *telos* of individual moral life if Gandhi is to be

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brought into a debate in contemporary moral philosophy. The debate between Western (largely Kantian) normative philosophy of a rule or principle-based kind and virtue ethics. A primary difference between virtue ethics and normative principle-based ethics is that virtue ethicists will typically place an explanatory priority on the virtues of character rather than on moral rules/principles of conduct. To many defenders of an ethical approach based on the virtues, the return to the virtues is connected with a turn towards relativism. That is a turn towards the view that the only appropriate criteria of ethical goodness are local ones, internal to the traditions and practices of each society or group that asks itself questions about the good. The rejection of general principles/rules in favour of an account of the good life based on specific modes of virtuous action is taken by many philosophers (as diverse as Alasdair MacIntyre, Bernard Williams and Phillipa Foot) to be connected with the abandonment of the project of rationally justifying a single norm of human flourishing for all human beings. There is instead in virtue ethics a reliance on values/norms that are local both in origin and in application. The position of the philosophers referred to above on virtues and ethical relativism is complex. None unequivocally endorses a relativist view. However, all of them connect virtue ethics with a denial that ethics offers any transcultural norms justifiable with reference to reasons of universal human validity in the context of which we may appropriately criticize different local conceptions of the good.

Gandhi made space for religion in morality and appeared unable to take a completely ahistorical view of the moral life. He seemed, for instance, to respect particular traditions of moral virtues (Jain, yogic, etc.). Perhaps it can be argued then that he was a relativist endorsing an internalism about religious and moral truths. Interestingly, Akeel Bilgrami (though he does not look at Gandhi as emphasizing virtues rather than moral rules) comes to similar conclusions about Gandhi. Arguing more ambitiously that Gandhi was not only a relativist about religious and moral truth but that there was a "….unblushing relativism, indeed subjectivism" (Bilgrami 2011, p. 96) about Gandhi's "….notion of truth (satya) …." itself (Bilgrami 2011, p. 96).

However, this might seem rather an odd conclusion about Gandhi. For it seems clear that Gandhi was not only a defender of an ethical theory which took traditional virtues seriously (in fact took pluralism of religious values even more seriously), but he was also the defender of "Fundamental truths" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 20) and an objective account of the good human life—the life of truth or God. In this context, it must be noted that the Gandhian virtues were conceived as the proper *means* to take man towards truth as the *telos* of human life. The practice of virtues led to the progressive freedom from the tyranny of the self and the ability to "see" things outside ego-directed frameworks. Gandhi believed that it was indeed possible to arrive at knowledge of how things really were as a matter of fact. In fact, he referred to an Absolute Truth as somewhat irrepressible and as sharing the clarity and lustre of the sun.

This chapter takes up the task of understanding Gandhi's truth. It philosophically examines the position that Gandhi had a relativist understanding of truth. In this context, the chapter will state and examine Professor Akeel Bilgrami's

reconstruction of Gandhi's position on moral judgement, moral principles, moral criticism and truth. Professor Bilgrami's argument constitutes an important contemporary philosophical reconstruction of Gandhi's notion of truth as primarily relativist. That such a discussion might be philosophically important is obvious enough, but it is specifically important to the central task of this book which is a philosophical examination of the Gandhi–Tagore debate. If Gandhi rejected objective moral truths and endorsed a Jain form of pluralism and internalism about truth (as Bilgrami thinks he did), it would be inconsistent for him (both in thinking and practice) to debate for about 26 years with Tagore about the truth of the central Gandhian "principles" (Gandhi himself used this term) such as *satyagraha*, non-cooperation, fasting, etc.

If Gandhi was indeed a relativist about truth, he would have accepted that it is a matter of an individual's experience that something is true from an individual point of view. According to Professor Bilgrami's argument, this is all there is to truth for Gandhi. However, the debate between Gandhi and Tagore was about truth—Tagore wrote "The Call of Truth" (*Modern Review*) and Gandhi addressed "The Poet's Anxiety" (*Young India*, June 1921). In this context, it is also interesting that Tagore should have raised potential possibilities of untruth/falsity in Gandhi's methods to arrive at the truth. One can recall that in *Theaetetus* Socrates attributes a relativism about truth to Protagoras. Socrates makes the important point that an inevitable consequence of the doctrine that makes man the "measure of all things" (Plato, *Theaetetus*, in Hetherington 2014, p. 118) is the problem of falsity. He argues that if Protagoras thinks that truth is relative to his experience he "must acknowledge the truth of his opponent's belief about his own belief where they think he is wrong" (Plato, *Theaetetus*, in Hetherington 2014, p. 117).

That Tagore raised the possibilities of untruth in Gandhi's methods, and that Gandhi did not acknowledge the truth of Tagore's belief about his beliefs, but debated with him (for about 26 years) about the truth of his fundamental beliefs is surely significant. For it clearly indicates that neither of them thought that truth was only relative to an individual's point of view. As Tagore said: "Why should he (Gandhi) not say: 'Come Ye from all sides and be welcome'…. But his call came to one narrow field alone. To one and all he simply says; 'Spin and weave'…. Is this the call; '*Let all seekers after truth come from all sides*?'" (Bhattacharya 2008, p. 81, emphasis is mine).

The Gandhi and Tagore debate was based upon the possibility of arriving at the truth or arriving at how things really were. It could also be argued that *debate itself* played a critical role in Gandhi's conception of a search for the truth. He debated with Savarkar about Indian nationalism and with Ambedkar about *varna*. Surely if Gandhi believed that truth was a matter of *one's own* individual moral experience, he could not have contemplated the possibility of different viewpoints being able to converge on the truth in any but a thin strategic sense. Gandhi believed in the possibilities of closure in arguments about moral value and on the convergence on truth itself as substantial and not merely strategic. This seems clear by his use of *satyagraha* and *tapasya*/self-suffering in order to arrive at the truth in conflict situations. Gandhi insisted that *satyagrahis* have to be ready to suffer even unto

death in order to arrive at the truthful solution of a conflict. They have to be ready during such conflict to either transform the opponent or be transformed by her in order to see the truth. It is therefore difficult to sustain any philosophical reconstruction of Gandhi which unequivocally claims that he was a complete relativist about truth.

In this context, one can recall the following Gandhian argument:

> Does not God Himself appear to different individuals in different aspects? *Still we know that he is one*. But Truth is the right designation of God. Hence there is nothing wrong in everyone following truth according to his own insights. Indeed it is his duty to do so. Thus if there is a mistake on the part of anyone following truth, it will automatically be set right… Directly he takes to the wrong path he stumbles, and is *redirected to the right path* (Bose 1948, p. 19, emphasis is mine).

Section 3.1 examines Professor Bilgrami's argument. Section 3.2 examines if that reconstruction of Gandhi is as a matter of fact close to what Gandhi himself said and did. Section 3.3 specifically addresses Bilgrami's contention that Gandhi had a relativist and purely "experiential" understanding of truth. Section 3.4 attempts an alternative reconstruction of Gandhi's truth. I argue in that section that Gandhi and Tagore shared an understanding of truth as being both about matters of fact and about one's moral and practical relationships to such matters of fact.

3.1 Gandhi's Truth: The Rejection of Moral Principles and Moral Criticism

In the philosophical reconstruction of Gandhi's central notions, Professor Bilgrami notes a certain "integrity" (Bilgrami 2006, p. 248) in Gandhi's ideas. The fact that "his thought itself was highly integrated; his ideas about very specific political strategies in specific contexts flowed (and in his mind necessarily flowed) from ideas which were very remote from politics" (Bilgrami 2006, pp. 248–249). An idea which was central to the integrity in Gandhian thought was "that non-violence was of a piece with the search for truth" (2006, p. 251). This connection between non-violence and truth has been reconstructed by Professor Bilgrami as coming from certain "ambitious and abstract considerations" (2006, p. 251). In fact (according to Professor Bilgrami), the connection emerged from a position fairly remote to Gandhi's politics and his reflections on the life of goodness. From a basic Gandhian opposition to moral principles, moral criticism and from a rejection of (what Bilgrami terms) a "*cognitive*" (Bilgrami 2006, p. 261) understanding of truth. He reinterprets Gandhi as opposed to the Enlightenment "at the deepest conceptual level" (2006, p. 261). As repudiating not only the very conception of reason as it has been understood in scientific terms but as rejecting truth itself as a "*cognitive* notion" (2006, p. 261). Bilgrami argues that Gandhi is driven to take such a stand because the Gandhian notion of *ahimsa* is wider than merely physical non-violence and is opposed to a certain dominant Kantian position in Western moral philosophy

which understands morality as principle or rule based. It is moral doctrines and principles according to Gandhi (as reconstructed by Bilgrami) which make possible moral criticism of those who fail to observe them. Moral criticism and moral principles/doctrines have powerful possibilities of degenerating into violence which is why Gandhi self-consciously expelled them from a good human life. However, the rejection of principles entails a rejection of any possibilities of the universalizability of one's moral convictions. (Universalizability according to Bilgrami is considerably weaker than universality). Such a stance then entails an alternative Gandhian understanding of moral judgements as neither generating nor reflecting principles but as setting examples. According to Bilgrami, this leads Gandhi to his "…'final and audacious integrating' philosophical move" (2006, p. 261): namely that "It is not propositions purporting to describe the world of which truth is predicated; it is only our moral experience which is capable of being true". It can be argued that

> He (Gandhi) is quite happy to discard as illusory our tendency to think that apart from the moral virtues involving truth (such as that *of telling* the truth, and living by and exemplifying our moral values) there is also in some sense *a value or virtue* in getting things right about the world…. (Bilgrami 2006, p. 263).

Given such a reconstruction of Gandhi, there is then nothing odd about Bilgrami's conclusion that Gandhi endorsed a form of internalism about truth. On this view, Gandhi had an "unblushing relativism, indeed subjectivism" (Bilgrami 2011, p. 96) about truth which can be traced to influences of the Jain theories of *anekantavada* and *syadvada*..

This is an interesting conclusion from Professor Bilgrami especially as he starts out with a most valuable philosophical suggestion. He observes that it has been common to read Gandhi's connection of truth with *ahimsa* as indicating that Gandhi was diffident about "his own convictions of the truth" (Bilgrami 2011, p. 97) as he or anyone else might have experienced it. This "spectacular misreading" (Bilgrami 2006, p. 252) of Gandhi's truth is fairly well entrenched in standard readings of Gandhi, and Bilgrami quotes a passage from Sumit Sarkar as a typical representation of it or rather a misrepresentation of Gandhi: "The search for truth was the goal of human life, and as no one could ever be sure of having attained the truth, use of violence to enforce one's own view of it was sinful" (Sumit Sarkar, quoted in Bilgrami 2006, p. 252). Bilgrami notes that this misreading of Gandhi's modesty, in holding on to one's moral judgements, brings Gandhi fairly close to one of the most celebrated liberal arguments for tolerance—the meta-inductive argument of Mill in *On Liberty*. Mill contends that since much that we have thought true in the past has turned out to be wrong, this in itself suggests that what we presently think true may also turn out to be wrong. We should therefore tolerate dissent about our present opinions just in case they are wrong. Bilgrami makes the point (which is most valuable for anyone who seeks to understand Gandhi) that while Gandhi would find the "modesty" (Bilgrami 2006, p. 252) in holding one's opinions appealing there is no sense in Gandhi of the idea that we cannot attain truth. Or of the idea that we cannot *know* that we have attained it. Given that Gandhi

spent his life searching for truth, it makes little sense to attribute to him a view that truth "is something we should seek, even if we cannot attain it" (Bilgrami 2006, p. 252).

Bilgrami argues that the source of Gandhi's non-violence, as a modesty in holding on to our opinions/truth, may not be found in a pervasive diffidence or lack of conviction about truth. Rather "its source is to be found in his [Gandhi's] conception of the very nature of moral response and moral judgment" (Bilgrami 2006, p. 253). As per this view, non-violence entails that: "It is equally important not to bear hostility to others or even to criticize them". The point of making moral judgements must not be to criticize others for "to think negatively and critically would be to give in to the spiritual flaws that underlie violence" (2006, p. 253). There is an alternative source of modesty in Gandhi which has "less to do with issues about truth and more to do with the way we must hold our moral values" (2006, p. 253). Professor Bilgrami now makes an interesting philosophical distinction. He argues that Gandhi believed that we could resist others without engaging in any criticism of them. For according to Gandhi "resistance is not the same as criticism. It can be done with a 'pure heart'". In contrast, criticism "reflects an impurity of heart, and is easily corrupted to breed hostility and, eventually, violence" (Bilgrami 2006, p. 254).

Gandhi, therefore,

> …severed the assumed theoretical connection between moral judgement and moral criticism, the connection which, in our analytical terms, we would describe by saying that if one judges that "x is good", then we are obliged to find morally wrong those who judge otherwise or fail to act on x (Bilgrami 2006, p. 254).

According to Professor Bilgrami, Gandhi's rejection of the connection between moral judgement and moral criticism was a denial of a connection which had a long history in Western (primarily Kantian) philosophical thinking. This was the idea that moral judgements unlike judgements of taste have a certain universalizability. Universalizability, though weaker than universality, "still generates the critical power which Gandhi finds disquieting" (Bilgrami 2006, p. 255). This raises an interpretative challenge for Bilgrami's understanding of Gandhi. If it is the case that a moral judgement does not entail any criticism of those who fall afoul then our choices of moral values might be significantly like our choices of taste, say, of a certain flavour of ice cream or of a certain colour. However, it is clear that Gandhi did not think that one's moral thinking was not relevant to others or was "closed off from others" (2006, p. 256). In particular, Gandhi "certainly did not want to sequester the relevance of one's religious and moral convictions to oneself…" (Bilgrami 2011, p. 100). Could it be possible to "reconcile the rejection of universalizability and of a value's potential in being wielded in criticism with this [Gandhian] yearning for the significance of one's choices to others?" (Bilgrami 2006, p. 256). Bilgrami thinks that Gandhi makes such a philosophical reconciliation. "In Gandhi's writing there is an implicit but bold proposal: when one chooses for oneself, *one sets an example to everyone*" (2006, p. 257). This replaces the

standard Western Kantian reading which might go as follows: "*When I choose for myself, I generate a principle for everyone to follow*" (Bilgrami 2011, p. 100).

According to Bilgrami, the shift from a principled reading of a moral judgement to the idea of exemplarity makes the moral psychology of our response to differing others much weaker and entirely consistent with Gandhian *ahimsa*. Gandhi believed that if others fall afoul all we can do is feel "disappointed in others that they will not follow our example" (Bilgrami 2006, p. 258). Gandhi is able to sustain such a view of moral judgement simply because he believes that "truth *is* a moral notion, and it is *exclusively* a moral notion" (2006, p. 260). Gandhi accepts Jain *anekantavada* as a form of pluralism and *syadvada* which is "a form of internalism about the truth, whereby the truth of a doctrine is judged entirely from within the point of view of the doctrine itself" (Bilgrami 2011, p. 96). Since truth is entirely experiential, there is no problem in everyone following truth according to his/her individual insights. Moral judgements cannot be about principles for there are none. Everyone comes to his/her own understanding of moral value. However, one can reconcile this relativism with a belief in the relevance of our moral convictions to others simply by seeing ourselves as moral exemplars.

Having reconstructed Gandhi's position on moral judgement, moral criticism and truth, Bilgrami is critical of *what he himself thinks* is Gandhi's conception of truth. As he argues (and correctly in my opinion if this is how Gandhi really thinks of truth) "There is a palpable mistake in collapsing the cognitive value of truth into the moral value of truth telling, a mistake evident in the fact that somebody who *fails* to *tell* the truth can, in doing so, still value *truth*" (Bilgrami 2006, p. 263). The immoral liar wants to conceal the truth precisely because "he still values truth" (2006, p. 263). The only sort of person who does not value truth at all is according to this view a "bullshitter". "This is the person who merely sounds off on public occasions… simply because he is prepared to speak or write in the requisite jargon, *without any goal of getting things right* not even (like the liar) concealing the right things which he knows" (Bilgrami 2006, p. 264).

I have broadly speaking two sorts of problems with Professor Bilgrami's reconstruction of Gandhi's position on moral judgement moral criticism and truth. One, problems with points made by Professor Bilgrami which might be of general philosophical interest. Two, whether Professor Bilgrami has *as a matter of fact* correctly reconstructed the Gandhian position on morals and on truth. The latter is dealt with in Sect. 3.2. However, I will state some general problems with the philosophical assumptions made in the argument stated above before closing this section.

To begin on a note of appreciation, some of the observations which have been made by Professor Bilgrami are of considerable philosophical significance. The first being that the dominant tradition in Western moral philosophy (which might be broadly characterized as Kantian) fails to read the possibilities of intolerance implicit in the notion of the strict universalizability of moral principles and rules. The related suggestion that there might be an internal inconsistency in the Christian insistence on both the strict universalizability of moral rules to human beings *qua* human beings and the virtue of humility is philosophically important. Secondly,

Professor Bilgrami's observation that the notion of truth which served as a paradigm for enlightenment thinkers and for science was a purely cognitive notion, though well noted by philosophers (one can recall here Nagel's description of the difficulties with a disinterested "view from nowhere"), is worth reiterating. Bilgrami explicitly brings out the fact that such a notion is entirely propositional and rules out any consideration that truth can involve the individual's moral and practical relationships to others and to the world in which he or she lives. On a purely cognitive understanding of truth, it is only propositions describing the world which can be true or false. Our individual experience of human relationships, and practical relations to the world, as involving our moral responses and reactive attitudes have nothing to do with propositional truth. That this notion should seem plainly mistaken to Gandhi (as to many moral aspirants) is hardly surprising. However, I have more to say about what might be wrong in the way in which Professor Bilgrami wields these points in the course of his argument.

The argument seems correct to emphasize that the notion of morality as proceeding from a set of strictly universal rules comes into conflict with humility a virtue (many associate with Christianity) which seems to be essential to a good human life. Yet, Bilgrami's argument could be seen to involve various problematic philosophical assumptions. I will try to articulate some philosophical difficulties with the argument in what follows below:

1. There is an assumption in this argument that to be discomforted by the strict universalizability of moral principles cannot be philosophically countered except by rejecting objective moral truths and criticism in moral philosophy and practice. However, it is possible to counter philosophical hesitation about moral principles (in the Kantian sense of that term) by a somewhat less drastic possibility. Perhaps by admitting some sort of context sensitivity of moral rules—the fact that all moral rules/doctrines *might* admit of exceptions. Further, it can even be argued that it is part of the very conception of a human moral rule/doctrine that it must so admit of exceptions in order for such principles/doctrines to count as "moral". For if a person who leads a good life believes in moral rules the manner in which he holds on to them cannot be entirely self-assured. If there is so much self-assuredness, it could indicate a moral self-righteousness/smugness which would be inconsistent with human goodness. It can be part of one's conception of a good person that he/she shows some humility in holding on to rules/doctrines in which he/she believes very strongly. One can reconstruct a consistent moral position admitting that there are moral truths/doctrines which could generate rough and ready general rules that can be applied to moral arguments in a manner so as to countenance the possibility of moral closure in such arguments. Yet, one can still believe that the application of all such moral truths/doctrines is conditional on the moral judgement of the person of practical wisdom. It can be argued that Aristotle's conception of practical wisdom/*phronesis* is required for the correct application of moral rules given the complicated nature of actual moral situations. One way in which one can, for instance, understand the necessity of the role of the judgement of the man of

practical wisdom in applying moral principles/doctrines to actual situations can be by recalling Bernard Williams' criticism of applying the principle of utility as a strictly universalizable rule. Williams notes that considerations such as those of the integrity of an individual moral life may serve to direct the application of the principle of utility (in which a moral agent might believe) to actual moral situations with which he/she is confronted (see Smart and Williams 1973, p. 100). One can argue that while such considerations would lead to the denial of moral principles, in the Kantian sense of that term, they do not lead to a denial of moral rules per se. Only to the denial of any requirement for strict universalizability as inconsistent with the nature of ordinary human moral life. If then there are exceptions to such rules the onus is on the one who tells a lie or on the one who kills/or fails to kill an intruder to save another to explain why that particular case counts as an exception to the general rule. That such a characterization of moral rules is certainly not Kantian (since Kant believed in unequivocal and categorical imperatives *qua* moral principles) ought not to be a reason for rejecting such an interpretation. One can say that strict universalizability in human moral matters is somewhat of a nonsensical notion.

2. Bilgrami's related idea that it is the universality or universalizability of moral judgements that generates possibilities of moral criticism (and also violence) is also problematic. One can argue that even if one rejects the idea of moral principles as universalizable one can still make moral judgements involving moral criticism in a particular situation. For instance, one can think that a person might make a moral judgement as follows: "In India, a poor country with a peculiar, complicated history of persistent conflicts on account of ethnic, linguistic and religious pluralism, it is immoral for the government to discourage Indian industry and focus on imports". One might simply not be interested in the universalizability of one's moral judgement. But does that *necessarily mean* that there can be no moral criticism of the Indian government in those particular circumstances in which the moral judgement has been made? My point is that moral criticism can be inextricably involved with making moral judgements even if one *does not believe* that one's moral judgement involves strictly universalizable moral principles. Secondly to make a negative moral judgement *in itself* is most often to judge a person, an act or an institution as immoral, unjust, wrong. First-order moral vocabulary itself can involve some sort of moral criticism.
3. What of moral criticism itself? Can it be said in an unqualified sense that moral criticism leads to a set of negative attitudes which are akin to, and can easily degenerate, into violence? One may recall that according to Bilgrami's argument, it was because Gandhi saw moral criticism as having the potentiality for violence that he rejected principles/doctrines in moral philosophy. I have problems with this position. For one it is slightly over simplistic. There could be not one but various ways to categorize moral criticism. One has to distinguish moral criticism of oneself by one's own self/others from one's own criticism of *others*. Another is to distinguish between criticism prompted by an interest in the hostile other's moral welfare and criticism prompted by a desire to harm the

other. The point is that it is difficult to dismiss the role of criticism in moral judgements and in leading a good human life without keeping these fine distinctions in mind.

As moral conflicts seem to be an inalienable part of human moral life some response to conflict appears to be necessary. If one makes a moral judgement which criticizes the other (with whom one disagrees morally), it might be prompted by love and by the strong desire to provoke self-reflection in that other. This for instance often happens when a parent morally criticizes a child or even vice versa. In the first place, if moral criticism prompted by love/interest in the moral welfare of the other provokes some self-examination in the other, it can play a useful part in his/her own moral development. He/she can think for instance, "Is my mother right about me? Am I really being selfish?" Secondly, it could be argued that a fairly important idea in leading the moral life is that such a life must be lived with grace. It can be argued that it is a part of leading a morally graceful life that one must develop the moral ability to demur and differ from others gracefully. In the case of criticism from others, it could be argued that it is a part of humility and suppression of the egoistic preoccupation with the self that one should be able to accept criticism, examine it, use it to provoke self-examination, and yet, not let oneself be destroyed by it. The crucial thing (if one is not to be a self-enclosed moral subject) is to be able to accept criticism but this might also imply the ability to undertake (gracefully and non-egoistically) some moral criticism of others in whose moral welfare one has an interest. Otherwise, we will be committed to a strange position in moral philosophy. We would be saying that criticism of oneself by others is a part of leading a good life but a good person cannot morally criticize another. If that is so how will it become possible to have moral criticism of any good person by another good person? The only sort of moral criticism of oneself would be by someone who is not interested in leading a good life at all or in being a good person. Such criticism would not be prompted by a desire for any one's moral welfare and it might be difficult to understand in what sense it could be a "moral" criticism at all.

It is also possible to argue that moral criticism can be an essential part of being able to substitute violence with non-violence in moral matters. That conflict is part of moral life is a given. If one cannot give voice to what one thinks is wrong with another's position out of politeness, fear or philosophical fastidiousness possibilities of violence will actually be enhanced rather than diminished. It could be argued that it is a part of living the moral life with grace that one substitutes (in the bad case of moral conflict) violence and negativity by criticism which is prompted by love/interest in the other's moral welfare. Further, such criticism might not necessarily be articulated harshly—one can also put things with a certain amount of grace. Such criticism ought to be theoretically distinguished from criticism of a negative kind that is criticism prompted by a desire to harm the other. It is not then philosophically possible or necessary to theoretically severe the assumed connection between moral judgement and moral criticism as inconsistent with the virtue of non-violence.

4. Another central idea in the moral life is that of resisting what one judges to be wrong. Think here of a man who claimed to be a good person and yet often turned a blind eye to his dearest friend very frequently lying to him about all sorts of things. One can imagine the good man as ignoring the fact that he knows that his friend is lying to him much of the time and that this is becoming a vicious habit with him. He, therefore, must pretend to himself that he is not really being lied to but after a while this becomes impossible. He can then only pretend to the friend that he actually believes his friend when in fact what happens is that he gradually loses faith in all of his statements. One can begin to think that if the first man is really a good man, his goodness would be constituted in part by the response such wrongdoing invoked in him; that he might begin to be seriously discomforted by the falsehood. The falsehood can gradually threaten the very existence of the friendship. It can now seem that if he is a good man he must feel morally compelled by his own leading of a good life to somehow resist the wrongdoer. It is possible to reconstruct what he might think as follows: "The friendship cannot simply go on like this. I am terribly discomfited and I think it my moral duty to point out to him that he does me, himself, and our friendship, grave wrong in making all three abide in untruth. In addition, I do him grave wrong by lacking the moral courage and requisite affection for him to brave my desire to avoid unpleasantness". Professor Bilgrami agrees with the necessity for resistance but distinguishes such resistance from moral criticism and argues further that the former is possible without the latter.

   The difference (for Bilgrami) lies in the fact that while resistance can be undertaken with a pure heart criticism necessarily involves impurity and in addition can degenerate easily into violence. Yet, before the good man resists his friend for instance by withdrawing from him, failing to respond to him, he must think to himself at the very least as I have put it above. The very idea of being a self-conscious moral subject involves the fact that one reasons out one's moral judgements to oneself as a thinking being. Such thoughts in themselves constitute moral criticism and moral judgement of the other as wrong in being a liar. What moral value lies in thinking so and not articulating such criticism to the other? If the good man seeks to resist his lying friend without saying why he now fails to respond to him can it be said that the good man is being truthful and being fair? Part of the sense of being fair to another involves the fact that before one resists another by failing to respond to him/her, one ought to have expressed one's position so that the other gets a chance to explain himself/herself and either be transformed by or transform one's critical judgement. If he/she fails in both one can certainly be driven to resistance but surely one must state the case first. Stating the case involves (at the very least) a gentle moral criticism of the position taken by the friend. Again, if the good man in the example was to resist his friend without explaining himself could it be said that he was being truthful to him and to the relationship they had shared? What purity of heart inspires such resistance? On the contrary, making a gentle criticism might be purer in

heart than harbouring the criticism and resisting the wrongdoer with no explanation for the withdrawal. It can of course be said that one can tell him why one is now resisting him without moral criticism, perhaps by setting an example to him by telling the truth to him always. However, that must be what the good man was doing in any case all the time that he was being deceived. In itself, then, that did not serve to explain things to his friend at all. Resistance, it seems to me, is only pure if it is based in truth. Such truth involves articulating one's moral difficulty to the person one wants prior to resisting him/her. Such honesty involves both moral criticism and moral judgement. Bilgrami fails to see that resistance can only follow and not replace moral criticism.

5. Professor Bilgrami argues that the idea of exemplarity can reconcile the rejection of moral principles and universalizability with the relevance of our moral convictions to others. The belief that our moral convictions are of relevance to others is important to our moral life because there is a sense in saying that "The virtuous person must be the exact opposite of a 'skulker'" (Bilgrami 2011, p. 100). In this context, Bilgrami refers to Robert Louis Stevenson's harsh profile of Thoreau "…Thoreau was a skulker. He did not wish virtue to go out of him among his fellow men, but slunk in a corner to hoard it for himself. He left all for the sake of certain virtuous self-indulgences" (2011, p. 100). As I said above, it is difficult to conceive of a moral aspirant as a self-enclosed moral subject. On this view, if the moral agent wishes to reject the notions of universalizability and moral principles and yet not be a skulker, she must think that she is setting an example whenever she makes a moral judgement. However, think of the person who is trying to lead a good human life. If such a person self-consciously sees herself as a moral exemplar, she may retain the sense of the moral relevance of her moral positions to others but have a sense of being morally self-assured. A person who thinks of herself as being a moral exemplar is most likely not to be a good person at all. For the self can be thought to be too much with her. It can be said that she lacks a sense of modesty, humility and egolessness which is an essential part of a life of goodness. It is problematic that Bilgrami should think of exemplarity as doing the philosophical work of bridging the distance between rejecting the universalizability of moral judgements and regarding one's moral judgements entirely as a matter of one's personal convictions.

Professor Bilgrami has made all these points in connection with his reconstruction of Gandhi. I argue that there are some serious problems with that philosophical reconstruction. One of course directly pertains to the subject matter of the present book—the Gandhi–Tagore debate. To agree that Gandhi was primarily a relativist about the truth and rejected both objective moral truths and a certain view of moral judgement as entailing the role of moral criticism in individual life would lead to a deep philosophical myopia regarding that debate. For the debate was mostly about the truth, of what Gandhi thought were fundamental moral "principles"/truths and Tagore's insistence on the individual's freedom to reject them. This debate involved a public exchange of letters in national dailies for over 26 years.

It is difficult to agree with the interpretation that the fact that Gandhi accepted moral criticism of himself as valuable, or argued about moral truths during this debate, only showed an inconsistency in his practice and not in his thinking. Gandhi showed a persistent belief in the possibility of arriving at the truth and thereby in the possibility of moral closure throughout this conflict. At no point did he show any sensitivity to relativism and subjectivism in the differences between himself and Tagore. Note that Bilgrami argues (about Gandhi) that "[f]ailing to live up to what one thinks one should and should not do is not to be inconsistent in one's thinking" (Bilgrami 2011, p. 99). If Gandhi self-consciously argued about the truth of *satyagraha*, non-cooperation, and bread labour intermittently for 26 years, it is difficult to accept that this was just inconsistency between his thinking and his practice. One will have to examine the possibility that a philosophical reconstruction which cannot countenance the debate could itself be a spectacular misreading of Gandhi. This also incidentally brings out the fact that this long debate has considerable philosophical influence in interpreting positions which appear very remote from its primary concerns; positions such as the following: what did Gandhi think about the connection between criticism and moral judgement? Did he believe in general moral rules or in any sort of objective moral truths?

3.2 Interrogating Gandhi: Moral Criticism, Moral Principles and Exemplars

This section examines Professor Bilgrami's position to see whether it is *as a matter of fact* faithful to what Gandhi thought. Professor Bilgrami argues (as discussed in the last section) that Gandhi's understanding of moral criticism as inconsistent with *ahimsa* led him to reject any connection between moral judgement and moral criticism. This had important philosophical consequences. It led Gandhi to reject the understanding of moral judgements as expressions of moral truths which can be shared across cultures and traditions. According to a dominant tradition in Western moral philosophy (which since Hume has been preoccupied with the status of moral judgements), moral judgements were connected to principles which were conceived as strictly universal or as universalizable.

In Hare's[1] terms, one could speak of "Proper Universals" (cited in Hudson 1970, p. 175). Hence when one made a moral judgement it generated a commitment to what one saw as an objective moral truth. Making a moral judgement entailed a critical response to those who fell afoul of that moral truth and the underlying moral principle. In Professor Bilgrami's view, since Gandhi believed that criticism had the

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[1] Hare argues that value judgments are "proper universals" whereas universal commands are not. For instance 'NO SMOKING' is short for 'Do not smoke in this cinema'. However, the value judgment 'You ought not to smoke' invokes a standard or principle. Hare believes that where 'ought' judgments, and in particular moral judgments, are concerned this principle must be completely universal.

potential for violence, he thought about moral judgements in a different way. Gandhi self-consciously thought that making moral judgements involved nothing more than setting examples for others. If such examples did not set one could at best be disappointed. Consequently, Gandhi thought of moral truth as purely individual and experiential. This led him to take a relativist position about moral truth and also about truth in general. For Gandhi (like Hume perhaps), there could be no objective truth only truth as different individuals experienced it.

This section argues that a careful reading of Gandhi will make it difficult to accept Professor Bilgrami's interpretation of Gandhi. Gandhi said and did several things which make us believe that he had a faith in objective moral truths which could be shared across individual moral experiences. It is important in this connection to recall that Gandhi was committed to a certain realism in moral matters which seems best brought out by his equation of "Truth" with "God". Gandhi also appeared fairly adamant about the possibilities of closure in arguments about truths. He recommended self-suffering (in *satyagraha*) even unto death for the sake of arriving at the truth. Consequently, Professor Bilgrami's interpretation of Gandhi could be philosophically misguided.

In this connection, I shall make three points across three subsections:

1. Gandhi did not reject the connection between moral judgement and moral criticism.
2. Gandhi believed that moral judgements could express "fundamental truths" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 19) which could be objective in the sense that they could be significantly shared across cultures and traditions. For Gandhi moral judgements involved (what I would like to term) moral "convictions". I would prefer to use moral "convictions" here in place of the term moral "principle". This is because though Gandhi himself often used the term "universal principle" (Bose 1948, p. 31), that term has had a history of association with certain philosophical debates in Western moral philosophy with which he was perhaps philosophically unacquainted. Consequently, Gandhi often referred to his moral convictions indiscriminately as moral laws/truths/principles.
3. That Gandhi did not conceive of moral judgements as setting examples and consequently of the moral agent as an exemplar. For the most important insight into the moral life in a Gandhian framework was simply that the self should not be too much with us. The idea of examples and exemplarity would involve a moral egoism which could for Gandhi dismantle the moral life itself.

Interestingly, Professor Bilgrami's argument which began with an anti-Millian interpretation of a Gandhian position on truth ends with a thorough going Gandhian relativism about truth. Gandhi on this view was not diffident about truth but he understood truth, only and entirely, as a matter of one's own personal convictions. The only way of making such convictions relevant to others for Gandhi was to see oneself *qua* moral subject as setting examples to others.

I agree with Professor Bilgrami that Gandhi was not thinking of individual moral life simply as a matter of applying *strictly universalizable principles* to actual situations. And I agree even though Gandhi often spoke of truth *ahimsa* and

satyagraha as universal principles/laws. I also agree that Gandhi's opposition to the enlightenment went significantly deeper than one might ordinarily think. It is a part of the central argument of this book that such divergence from the enlightenment was one of the reasons for Gandhi's differences from Tagore. Tagore had a more sympathetic understanding of (and relationship with) the enlightenment and its central ideas. It was in such a context that Gandhi was opposed to a purely cognitive understanding of truth completely divorced from moral experience. (Perhaps a large part of his critique of modernity came from this opposition). Though this is a most valuable insight, it might not quite lead Gandhi (where Bilgrami thinks it leads him) to a thoroughgoing relativism about truth in general and moral truth in particular. There are various stages in Bilgrami's argument that fail to do justice to Gandhi's own ideas. In what follows I will attempt to bring out these difficulties.

3.2.1 Moral Criticism and Gandhian Ahimsa

Professor Bilgrami has argued that *ahimsa* led Gandhi to a rejection of moral criticism. Consequently, Gandhi rejected the relationship between a moral judgement and a moral rule/conviction. At a "…deeper realm of violence… the very idea of principles and doctrines are subtly and *indirectly* implicated" (Bilgrami 2011, p. 98). Gandhi rejected universality, the much weaker notion of universalizability and finally moral principles/doctrines themselves. Gandhi was driven to this because "….despite the fact that it [universalizability] is much weaker than universality… it still generates the *critical* power which Gandhi finds disquieting" (Bilgrami 2006, p. 255).

There has been a change in Professor Bilgrami's position. While in earlier papers (Bilgrami 2006) he said that Gandhi was against moral criticism per se, he later argues that

> Gandhi was not against criticism of institutions and policies and even of whole civilizational tendencies and himself made such criticism frequently as, say, in *Hind Swaraj* where he is harshly critical of the modern west. But he tried throughout his life to avoid criticism of individuals. And the fact is that even if he was often critical of individuals, that does not overturn his intellectual opposition to such criticism. Failing to live up to what one thinks one should and shouldn't do is not to be inconsistent in one's thinking (Bilgrami 2011, p. 98–99).

There are philosophical difficulties with this interpretation of Gandhi. Gandhi argued at many places that *ahimsa* was a wider notion than merely physical non-violence. However, this *in itself* does not seem to be philosophically sufficient to establish that Gandhi rejected moral criticism and the idea that moral judgements involved objective moral doctrines. Yet, this seems to be all the evidence that Professor Bilgrami requires for his entire argument. The argument itself seems to beg the question and assume what it wants to prove. On this view, we must begin with the assumption that since Gandhi had a wide view of *ahimsa* as involving non-violence in action, word and thought, he must have believed that moral criticism (which is a necessary consequence of a belief in a general moral doctrine) provokes

violence in thought and speech. Therefore, even though Gandhi engaged in the criticism of institutions, he did not engage in criticism of individuals. If criticism per se has the potential for violence (which is Bilgrami's view), there may not be any significance in making a distinction between the criticism of individuals and that of institutions. This would be especially be true of the present case. For in the reconstruction of the moral ideas of Gandhi who was leading a national movement against an imperial government and its institutions, it would take us to a difficult conclusion. It would lead to the strange position that while Gandhi was comfortable with criticism and thereby possibilities of violence against institutions and governments, he was not comfortable with the criticism of individuals. However, Professor Bilgrami does makes the distinction in this way and he goes on to say that, even if it turns out that Gandhi did morally criticize individuals, he failed to live up to what (Bilgrami argues) he set out to believe.

Firstly, it is important to note that the relevant Gandhian distinction is not that between the criticism of *individuals* and *institutions* but that between criticism of *positions* and *individuals*. Gandhi did not reject moral criticism per se and he made a distinction between criticism of positions and that of individuals. Gandhi argued that it was wrong to criticize individuals (for a man and his position/action are two different things), but he accepted that the criticism of positions could be morally valuable. There are numerous places where Gandhi makes this distinction:

> Man and his deed are two distinct things. Whereas a good deed should call forth approbation and a wicked deed disapprobation, the doer of the deed, whether good or wicked, always deserves respect or pity as the case may be. "Hate the sin and not the sinner" (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol. VI, pp. 171–172).
>
> A *satyagrahi* must never forget the distinction between evil and the evil-doer. He must not harbour ill will or bitterness against the latter….
>
> I hold myself incapable of hating any being on earth…. But I can and do hate evil wherever it exists. I hate the system of government that the British people have set up in India… even as I hate from the bottom of my heart the hideous system of untouchability for which millions of Hindus have made themselves responsible. But I do not hate the domineering Englishman as I refuse to hate the domineering Hindus…. My personal religion peremptorily forbids me to hate anybody (Bose 1948, pp. 156–157).

This Gandhian distinction was significant for it made space for criticism in moral judgements and in individual moral life. It is possible to reconstruct a number of moral arguments in Gandhi which show that he was not against moral criticism. One fairly straightforward argument emerges from Gandhi's difficulty with the individual ego as an obstruction to truth. For Gandhi, when a person criticized the position of another as false/sinful, such criticism could help that "other" overcome an egoism of vision which obstructed his/her access to the truth. At the same time, since one could properly be critical of positions for being contrary to one's considered moral convictions and not critical of individuals (since individuals—others as well as oneself—could make moral mistakes), the distinction functioned as a theoretical safeguard against such criticism degenerating into violence. Another safeguard against the possibilities of violence implicit in criticism emerged from the

fact that Gandhi had some understanding of how criticism ought to be made if it was to serve any useful role in moral life. In the context of the debate with Tagore, Gandhi said: "Frank criticism pleases me. For our friendship becomes richer for our disagreements.… Only disagreements must have no sharpness much less bitterness about them. And I gratefully admit that there is none about the poet's criticism" (Gandhi, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 122). One can appreciate Gandhi's point if one recalls that a fairly central idea in morality is the idea of gracefulness. If a moral life is a life lived with grace, criticism also needs to be undertaken with a certain degree of grace. Therefore, it must not be bitter and sharp but truthful and gracious.

It is possible to substantiate this point by examining Gandhi's own criticism of positions taken up by individuals. For instance, one can recall Gandhi's comments about Subhas Chandra Bose and the Kashmiri leader Sheikh Abdullah. He wrote to Andrews in this context that: "I feel that Subhas is behaving like a spoilt child of the family…" (Gandhi, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 18). At another place, he said "… though I did not accept Subhas Bose's belief in violence and his consequent action, I have not refrained from giving unstinted praise to his patriotism, resourcefulness and bravery" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 151). He also said that "…I could not approve of Sheikh Abdullah's resort to arms…" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 151). On an empirical note, this shows that though Bilgrami is correct in making the claim that Gandhi never criticized individuals, that does not mean that Gandhi never criticized the positions that individuals took in their judgements and actions.

Another more serious argument in support of the value of criticism for the individual's leading of a good human life comes from Gandhi's statements about the importance of criticism made in the interest of truth. Gandhi argued that moral criticism could be entirely consistent with *ahimsa* if it was made without an intention to harm the *other*. Gandhi not only explicitly welcomed moral criticism of himself by other individuals, undertook such criticism of other individuals and institutions, but he also argued explicitly about the value of criticism. It is well known that Gandhi understood *ahimsa*/non-violence as a complete ethical discipline:

> *Ahimsa* is not the crude thing it has been made to appear. Not to hurt any living thing is no doubt a part of *ahimsa*. But it is its least expression. The principle of *ahimsa* is hurt by every evil thought, by undue haste, by lying, by hatred, by wishing ill to anybody. It is also violated by our holding on to what the world needs (Gandhi, *From Yeravda Mandir*, in Narayan 1995, vol. IV, p. 218).

Gandhi explained *himsa*: "*Himsa* means causing pain to or killing any life out of anger, or from a selfish purpose, or with the intention of injuring it. Refraining from so doing is *ahimsa*" (Bose 1948, p. 155). This clarification (in itself) makes it apparent that causing pain by critical speech to another is only violent when it is done from anger, selfishness or with the intention to harm/injure. In an interesting passage written in 1936, Gandhi argued clearly that moral criticism made in the interest of arriving at the truth was consistent with *ahimsa.*

> To say or write a distasteful word is surely not violent especially when the speaker or writer believes it to be true. The essence of violence is that there must be a violent intention behind a thought, word, or act. i.e., an intention to do harm to the opponent so called.

> False notions of propriety or fear of wounding susceptibilities often deter people from saying what they mean and ultimately land them on the shores of hypocrisy. But if non-violence of thought is to be evolved in individuals or societies or nations, truth must be told, however harsh it may appear to be for the moment (Bose 1948, p. 157).

This passage makes it clear that criticism of the offending *other* undertaken in the interest of truth or in the interest of the *other's* moral welfare (and without any intention to harm him/her) is the only way of evolving non-violence of thought. This is an interesting thought. It can be understood when one recalls that truth is the *telos* of Gandhi's conception of individual life. Truth can (as has been argued in the last chapter) be understood as the ability to see things as they really are outside the self-projective demands made by one's ego directed desires. To speak truthfully and plainly can play an important role in helping the *other* to dismantle his/her ego directed reconstructions of situations which can be obstructions to truth. That such plain speaking will be distasteful should be apparent when one considers how entrenched and deep, ego directed interpretations of positions and actions, are in individual moral psyches. Gandhi's use of the phrase "non-violence of thought" (Bose 1948, p. 157) refers to an individual's state of being where responses to others are primarily motivated by a desire to see things clearly/in truth. This state can be achieved by a progressive/love of all including those with whom one differs. In terms of the passage above, it appears that such love for others necessarily implies that one who aspires to being non-violent in thought must be courageous enough to speak plainly and with an intention to help others see themselves (and situations) as they really are in truth. It must be remembered that according to Gandhi, "Knowledge of one as he is can always do good … never any harm" (Bose 1948, p. 246). Gandhi's argument above makes it apparent that being critical of the untruthful other's position in the interest of truth (with no intention to harm anyone) plays a critical role in evolving individual non-violence of thought. In this context, Gandhi emphasized the necessity of making criticisms when they were intended in the interest of truth: "When it is relevant, truth has to be uttered, *however unpleasant it may be*" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 47, emphasis is mine).

One can reconstruct another argument about the importance of criticism in Gandhi's thinking of the moral life if one considers that criticism was a constituent of Gandhian *satyagraha*. Moral criticism of unjust positions formed the first or preliminary stage in undertaking to resist wrongdoer's and wrongdoing i.e., *satyagraha.* In this context, it is important to take note of the fact that Gandhi himself made it fairly clear that resistance against the position of a wrongdoer necessarily involved both moral judgement and moral criticism. This becomes apparent when one considers the stages in Gandhian *satyagraha*:

> A *satyagrahi*, for instance, must first mobilize public opinion against the evil which he is out to eradicate, by means of a wide and intensive agitation. When public opinion is sufficiently roused against a social abuse even the tallest will not dare to practise or openly to lend support to it. An awakened and intelligent public opinion is the most potent weapon of a *satyagrahi* (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol. VI, pp. 192–193).

According to this view, it is only *after* one has educated not only the wrongdoer but the public at large about the evil in the position one seeks to resist, that resistance in the form of dissociation, civil disobedience, etc., can justifiably take place. What can such non-violent mobilization of public opinion against evil mean but the individual's effort to put forth her moral criticism of what she understands as wrongdoing? Gandhi goes on to argue that it is only "When a person supports a social evil in total disregard of unanimous public opinion" that "it indicates a clear justification for his social ostracism" (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol. VI, p. 193). It is clear enough from this argument that for Gandhi moral criticism was not just a part of resistance but the first stage that was essential before resistance/*satyagraha* itself could be carried out. There are numerous examples in Gandhi's writing and practice where he justified resistance to what he termed immoral laws, injustice, evil, sin by a preliminary criticism of the position he sought to resist. For instance, during the debate with Tagore about the boycott of educational institutions, Gandhi argued in *Young India* (in June 1921) that "…I must differ with him…. I hold that, as soon as we discovered that the system of government was wholly, or mainly evil, it became sinful for us to associate our children with it" (Gandhi, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 66). Again, in connection with the burning of foreign cloth Gandhi argued in *Young India* (in October 1921):

> Therefore I consider it a sin to wear foreign cloth …. Economics that hurt the well-being of a nation are immoral and therefore sinful …. On the knowledge of my sin bursting upon me, I must consign the foreign garments to the flames and thus purify myself, and thenceforth rest content with the rough *khadi* made by my neighbours…. I venture to suggest to the Poet that the clothes I ask him to burn must be and are his…. (Gandhi in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 90).

That this was not a passing inconsistency between Gandhi's belief and practice ought to have become apparent by now. However, it might gain further support if one observes that Gandhi not only morally criticized positions which he opposed during situations of moral conflict but that he made arguments about the value of moral criticism in itself. The one place where such arguments become most evident was during the Gandhi Tagore debate. Thus, in response to Tagore's criticism of his "principles" as unthinking "*mantras*" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 78), Gandhi wrote an essay entitled "The Great Sentinel". While noting the value of the criticism made by Tagore, Gandhi described him as a sentinel:

> It is good, therefore, that the poet has invited all who are slavishly *mimicking* the cult of the *charkha* boldly to declare their revolt. His essay serves as a warning to us all who in our impatience are betrayed into intolerance even violence against those who differ from us. I regard the poet as a sentinel warning us against the approaching enemies called Bigotry, Lethargy, Intolerance, Ignorance, Inertia and other members of that brood (Gandhi, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 88).

Gandhi argues (in the passage above) that criticism which is not prompted by anger, selfishness or by a desire to harm serves as a warning against an egoistic self-preoccupied vision in moral matters. It is such a vision which obstructs how things really are and leads the moral aspirant to moral complacence/inertia, ignorance/

untruth, and to anger and violence against those who do not cooperate with that vision. Elsewhere, Gandhi noted that these sources of untruth are internal enemies of the moral life: "Our difficulties are of two kinds: those that are imposed from without and those that are of our own creation. The latter are far more dangerous, because we often hug them and are therefore reluctant to remove them" (Bose 1948, p. 246). Gandhi was aware that in the pursuit of the truth a sincere moral aspirant could well develop egoism about his commitment to a life of goodness. This could develop into a moral self-assuredness, which would lead the aspirant into a blindness about difference and possibilities of making moral mistakes. It is the nature of such moral blindness to progressively enclose an individual in an unreal world distanced from how things really are. It is perhaps in the nature of such moral blindness that it grows on itself and progressively dismantles the moral life by strengthening the preponderance of the self. Hence, in the Gandhian view, a well-intentioned set of criticisms could function as a sentinel in an individual's moral life. It must be noted that Gandhi's use of the word *sentinel* is significant, for by the definition of that term, a sentinel is a person who warns us about approaching enemies in the interest of our own well-being and safety. Gandhi's description of Tagore as a sentinel *qua* strong public critic of his (Gandhi's) moral convictions is surely of some import. In the same spirit at another time during the debate, Gandhi wrote a letter to Tagore in April 1919 where he likened moral criticism/"adverse opinions from friends" to "so many lighthouses", which served "…to give out warnings of dangers lying in the stormy paths of life" (Gandhi in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 48). He went on to write to Tagore that:

> Charlie's [C.F. Andrews'] friendship has been to me on this account an invaluable treasure, because he does not hesitate to share with me even his unconsidered notes of dissent. This I count a great privilege. May I ask you to extend at this critical moment the same privilege that Charlie has? (Gandhi, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 48)

3.2.2 The Possibility of Objective Moral Truths in Gandhi

It is interesting that Gandhi should have observed that the role of criticism in the moral life was somewhat close to that of a sentinel/lighthouse issuing warnings of impending dangers to the good human life. What then about the Gandhian position on moral principles? To begin with, it is necessary to note that Gandhi made a distinction between two sorts of moral convictions: what could be described as maxims or contextualized moral rules and fundamental moral truths. Moral rules, such as the obligatoriness of spinning for all Indians and the boycott of educational institutions, were only valid in a context. However, fundamental moral convictions/ moral truths could be shared across individual moral experiences even though they were *not* conceived to be strictly universalizable. Such Gandhian convictions included the belief that truth was the *telos* of a good human life and that *ahimsa* was the means to reach truth.

Professor Bilgrami's suggestion that Gandhi did not think of moral principles as essentially universal/universalizable is most valuable. However, there are two related issues. The first is whether Gandhi's acceptance of moral criticism involved a faith in objective moral truths/convictions. The second is, did Gandhi think of moral convictions as strictly universal/universalizable moral principles? Professor Bilgrami argues that a belief in objective moral truths implies the acceptance of the universality/universalizability of moral principles and thereby generates possibilities of moral criticism. However, there can be another possibility which Bilgrami does not consider. Gandhi could indeed have believed in objective moral truths/convictions and yet not thought of them in the manner in which Western moral philosophy has thought of moral principles.

One can of course ask whether such questions are philosophically significant. Why should it matter if Gandhi conceived of moral truths as strictly universal/universalizable moral principles? A significant philosophical repercussion of a Gandhian faith in objective moral truths/convictions would be that it could then be possible for Gandhi to think in non-relative terms about moral values. Consequently, moral conflicts would not be interminable (in a Gandhian framework) by the nature of the case but admit of the possibilities of closure. It would then make perfect sense for Gandhi to engage (as he did) in debates with Tagore about the truth of moral "principles" (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol. VI, p. 117) in which he believed. Secondly, if moral convictions/principles were seen by Gandhi as strictly universalizable (somewhat in the manner of Kant's categorical imperative), then the individual moral life could appear to be fairly simple—a matter of applying exception-less rules to actual moral situations.

On the face of it, Gandhi's position on moral "principles" (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol. VI, p. 117) seems philosophically distant from Bilgrami's interpretation of Gandhi. On a seriously contrary note, Gandhi was concerned with what he calls "moral principle(s)" (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol. VI, p. 117). It is important to note that though Gandhi refers to "fundamental Truths" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 19) in individual moral life as "Universal Principle (s)" (Bose 1948, p. 31), the use of "principle" has to be seen in relation to the Gandhian context. It is important to remember that Gandhi was not philosophically acquainted with the debate on moral "principles" in Western moral philosophy and so used principle/law/doctrine interchangeably for what he thought were fundamental moral truths. I suggest that Gandhi can be philosophically reconstructed as being committed to the possibility of objective moral truths/convictions and consequently that it is possible that he was not a relativist about truth. Fundamental moral truths/moral principles were taken by Gandhi much in the sense of settled moral convictions which guided (and were confirmed by) individual moral experiences. I prefer to use the term "conviction" to describe what Gandhi calls "principles" rather than the term "belief". For, as Hume has rightly argued (see his *Treatise of Human Nature*), moral "beliefs" do not seem to be intrinsically motivating. Gandhi thought that fundamental moral convictions (as for instance that truth was the end of human life and that *ahimsa* was the only means to truth) were intrinsically motivating for human beings. Further, insofar as

they were intrinsically motivating, this distinguished human beings *qua* human beings from "brutes" (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol. VI, p. 156).

In this context, there are various arguments that Gandhi himself made about truth and *ahimsa*—what he calls "fundamental truths" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 20), "universal rules of conduct" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 74), "law(s) of the species" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 23), "eternal truths" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 25) and "Universal Principle(s)" (Bose 1948, p. 31). Gandhi argued that an individual moral life (with or without religion) has a need for/a dependence upon a belief in moral truths/convictions. An individual moral aspirant has to believe in moral truths so as to become inculcated into the life of goodness/practice of virtues. In this context, Gandhi said: "The rankest agnostic or atheist does acknowledge *the need of a moral principle*, and associates something good with its observance and something bad with its non-observance" (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol. VI, p. 117, emphasis is mine). Gandhi unself-consciously reconciled the opposition between an ethics of principles and an ethics of virtues which was important in Western moral philosophy. He connected an ethics of principles/rules with a virtue ethics. He argued that moral convictions which are expressed as general rules of conduct *can and must be* cultivated as virtues or dispositions of character. "There are eternal principles which admit of no compromise, and one must be prepared to lay down one's life in the practice of them" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 39).

This leads to another important point about Gandhi's belief in moral convictions. He had a sense of a circular relationship between one's settled moral convictions and one's moral experiences and moral practice. While moral convictions guided individual moral experience one grew in one's knowledge of such convictions through one's moral experience. It is important to examine these arguments in some detail so that Gandhi's position on moral principles can be understood in the context of Bilgrami's interpretation of that position.

Gandhi clearly described his moral convictions about truth and *ahimsa* as moral principles. For instance, he said: "For me truth is the sovereign principle, which includes numerous other principles. This truth is not only truthfulness in word, but truthfulness in thought also, and not only the relative truth of our conception, but the Absolute truth, the Eternal Principle, that is God." (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 42). For Gandhi, Truth was linked to *ahimsa* as two sides of a coin; "Non-violence is embedded in Truth and vice versa.… Either is inseparable from the other" (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol. VI, p. 150). Truth and *ahimsa* were fundamental moral convictions in Gandhi. However, he also spoke of "numerous other principles" such as spinning, *swadeshi*, etc. These differed from the "fundamental Truths" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 19); that is, truth and *ahimsa* were relative to a certain context: "… there are not many fundamental truths, but there is only one fundamental truth which is Truth itself otherwise known as Non-violence" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, pp. 19–20).

Gandhi differentiated contextual moral truths/maxims from what he called "Absolute" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 42)/fundamental truths. We can interpret Gandhi as making a distinction between fundamental truths/moral convictions and subjective principles of action or moral maxims (to use a word borrowed from Kant), which were relative to a certain context. The former were seen to be objective ethical

truths as there were possibilities of such moral truths being *shared* across moral experiences, cultures, religions and traditions. Maxims/relative truths on the other hand were derivative rules drawn from the fundamental truths in order to guide action in the particular context in which a moral agent found himself. Significantly this could for Gandhi be a *shared* religious, political, economic or social context. This becomes most evident in the debate regarding spinning between Tagore and Gandhi. Spinning was reconstructed by Gandhi as a form of bread labour particularly appropriate for the socio-economic-political condition of India in the 1920s. Hence, he derived a moral maxim/rule of action which was not individual but contextual. "The spinning wheel is the thing which all must turn *in the Indian clime* for the transition stage at any rate and the vast majority must for all time" (Gandhi, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 90, emphasis is mine). In response to Tagore's doubts about the necessity for following this "*mantra*". Gandhi was adamant about the applicability of spinning for all in that context: "I do indeed ask the poet and the sage to spin the wheel as a sacrament" (Gandhi, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 88).

It is important to keep this Gandhian distinction in perspective for the fact that Gandhi at times recognized that there could be derivative moral rules relative to a particular context should not be taken to mean that he did not believe in the possibility of objective moral truths per se. It should be noted that for Gandhi (in situations of moral conflict), there could be an appeal to fundamental moral convictions which could be shared across moral experiences and religions. Such fundamental moral convictions could make for the possibilities of closure in cases of moral conflict: "We have to make truth and non-violence not matters for mere individual practice but for practice by groups and communities and nations. That, at any rate, is my dream. I shall live and die in trying to realize it" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 24). Gandhi stressed that: "The lesson of non-violence is present in every religion…" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 116).

It is in order to emphasize this shared character of fundamental moral truths, Gandhi often refers to them as laws of the human species and as coming naturally to man *qua* man: "Man's nature then is not *himsa*, but *ahimsa* …" and "… only to the extent that he practises it does he adorn his kind" (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol. VI, p. 155). "Consciously or unconsciously, we are acting non-violently towards one another in daily life ….I have found that life persists in the midst of destruction and, therefore, there must be a higher law than that of destruction" (Narayan 1995, vol. VI, p. 158). For Gandhi, "Non-violence is the law of our species…" (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol. VI, p. 156).

Of Truth, Gandhi said, "Truth resides in every human heart…" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 44), and that "…every problem would lend itself to solution if we are determined to make the Law of Truth and non-violence the Law of Life" (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol. VI, p. 165). That there were fundamental moral truths or shared moral convictions for Gandhi must not make us think that Gandhi thought that such truths were a priori i.e., completely independent of an individual's moral experience. Gandhi believed that though there were possibilities of sharing moral convictions across individual moral experiences, yet one had an experiential relationship to one's moral convictions. One could grow in the knowledge of them, become at home in their practice and make experiments about their full implications

for the individual moral life. This was the sense in which he spoke of his "experiments with truth". The relationship between moral experiences and moral convictions seemed circular in Gandhi. Though one could not *derive* a belief in moral convictions/fundamental truths purely from individual moral experiences one could become more at home with one's moral convictions. Gandhi had faith in fundamental moral truths which guided individual moral experience. Individual moral experiences/experiments in turn helped the aspirant grow in the knowledge of those moral convictions. This seems clear from the following argument in Gandhi:

> Non-violence … is capable of being practised by the millions, not with full knowledge of its implications but because it is the Law of our species. It distinguishes man from the brute… This striving applies to the practice of non-violence, not to the belief in it. I cannot strive to believe in a principle: I either believe in it or I do not. And if I believe in it, I must bravely strive to practise it… (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol. VI, p. 156).

Gandhi explicitly addressed the question of *how* one could justify one's fundamental moral convictions. He was clear that moral knowledge came from two sources—faith and moral experience. He stressed that reason could not prove fundamental moral truths: "…the safest course is to believe in the moral government of the world and therefore in the supremacy of the moral law, the law of Truth and Love …I confess … that I have no argument to convince… through reason. Faith transcends reason" (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol. VI, p. 105). Alternatively, it was moral experience which helped moral aspirants to confirm their beliefs and grow in the knowledge of fundamental moral convictions. It was in this context that Gandhi spoke of the life of virtue as a moral training which gradually led an individual to develop the ability for moral discrimination and practical judgement. In cases where an individual had developed a practical judgement, it became an inner voice which made moral convictions and their application almost self-evident: "There come to us moments in life when about some things we need no proof from without. A little voice within us tells us… " (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 31). However, "Before one is able to listen to that voice, one has to go through a long and fairly severe course of training…" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 32).

It is possible to argue that though Gandhi accepted fundamental moral truths, he did not take any philosophical interest in the strict universalizability of such moral convictions and admitted both, the possibility of exceptions and the importance of the practical judgement of the good man, in the application of moral truths/convictions to actual situations. In an important sense, then Gandhi did not associate the belief in objective moral truths with the idea that they must necessarily be applied in an a priori manner before attending to the particularities of the individual experience of any actual situation.

That Gandhi did not conceive of moral convictions in standard Western philosophical terms will become clear from two things:

1. Though Gandhi had faith in objective moral truths he had problems with a self-assured legislating of moral principles independently of a consideration of the particularities of an actual moral situation. It may be recalled that Kant's strictly universalizable categorical imperative was to be applied in an a priori manner

independently of individual experience. Gandhi rejected the notion of a priori moral principles because he was sensitive to the possibilities of a moral agent developing a self-righteous blindness to the complexities of actual moral situations. Gandhi thought that self-righteousness was a moral problem as it involved the preponderance of the self. In this context, he had said: "There is always the fear of self-righteousness possessing us, the fear of arrogating to ourselves a superiority we do not possess" (Bose 1948, *Introduction*: p. viii).

2. Gandhi explicitly discussed the possibility of exceptions to the moral "principle" (Bose 1948, p. 31) of *ahimsa* and the role of the practical judgement of the good man in applying that conviction to actual human life. It is clear that if the application of a moral conviction is sensitive to the moral judgement of the good man in any actual situation, then it cannot be legislated a priori and before the experience of that situation. It can be argued that what Gandhi was rejecting about the Western philosophical conception of moral principles was their a priori character as essentially independent of the moral experience of actual moral situations and as dependent on man's rational nature *qua* man.

To begin with the first point: Gandhi did not think that belief in the power of moral truths to generate a priori imperatives *qua* strictly universalizable principles was in any way part of a belief in moral truths themselves. This becomes clear when one considers that Gandhi was sensitive to the moral necessity to respond to the particularities of every moral situation from within an individual moral life. Consequently, even of truth Gandhi said "I ask nobody to follow me. Everyone should follow his or her own inner voice. If he or she has no ears to listen to it, he or she should do the best he or she can" (Iyer 2009, p. 215). Gandhi's sense of the dangers from the self lurking in even the smallest sense of self-assuredness in moral matters —dangers such as moral smugness, and blindness to possibilities of making moral mistakes—made his understanding of moral truths significantly different from the dominant Western conception of moral principle.

It was perhaps in such a spirit that Gandhi specified several situations where the principle of non-violence would not be applicable even for an aspirant who believed in it strongly. He himself advocated the extermination of pests and the killing of a rabid dog instead of allowing it to die slowly. He once killed an ailing calf to prevent further suffering. Discussing possible exceptions to the law of *ahimsa*, he made the following observations:

> If I wish to be an agriculturist…. I will have to use the minimum of violence to protect my fields …. To allow crops to be eaten up by animals in the name of *ahimsa* while there is famine in the land is certainly a sin …. What is good in certain conditions can become an evil or a sin under a different set of conditions (Iyer 2009, p. 206).

> …taking life may be a duty. We do destroy as much life as we think necessary for sustaining our body …. Even manslaughter may be necessary in certain cases. Suppose a man runs amuck and goes furiously about sword in hand, and killing anyone that comes his way, and no one dares to capture him alive. Anyone who despatches this lunatic, will earn the gratitude of the community and be regarded as a benevolent man (Iyer 2009, p. 207).

In this context, Gandhi responded to moral critics about his own behaviour being inconsistent with his belief in *ahimsa*. This criticism was made specifically about his participation in ambulance services in the Boer war in 1899 and his touring India in 1918 to raise recruits for the British armed forces. Gandhi responded by making arguments which did not reject *ahimsa* as a moral truth that could be shared by human beings. However what Gandhi did reject was the strict universalizability and the a priori character of moral principles as a going concern in individual moral life.

> There is no defence for my conduct weighed only in the scale of *ahimsa*. I draw no distinction between those who wield the weapons of destruction and those who do Red-Cross work. Both participate in war and advance its cause. Both are guilty of the crimes of war…. Life is governed by a multitude of forces. It would be smooth sailing if one could determine the course of one's action only by one general principle whose application at a given moment was too obvious to need even a moment's reflection. But I cannot recall a single act which could be so easily determined (Gandhi, in Bose 1948, pp. 175–176).

It can be conclusively said that Gandhi accepted fundamental moral convictions which could significantly be shared by all human beings with the necessary rider of the context sensitivity of all moral rules. The fact that all moral truths *might* admit of exceptions in certain human situations. Further it can even be argued that Gandhi believed that it is a part of the conception of a human moral conviction that it must admit of exceptions in order to count as "moral". For if a person who leads a good life believes in moral truths the manner in which he holds on to them cannot be entirely self-assured. If there is so much self-assuredness, it would indicate a moral self-righteousness/smugness which could seem inconsistent with human goodness. Gandhian moral convictions were conceived as rough and ready generalizations which could be applied to moral arguments in a manner so as to countenance the possibility of moral closure in such arguments. Yet, for Gandhi one could still consistently believe that the application of all such moral truths was conditional on the moral judgement of the man of practical wisdom. He seemed to have made conceptual room for a notion such as Aristotle's conception of practical wisdom/ *phronesis* which was required for the correct application of moral convictions given the complicated nature of actual moral situations.

3.2.3 The Gandhian Exemplar

In Professor Bilgrami's account, Gandhi rejected moral principles/doctrines per se. Consequently, he needed to bridge the philosophical distance between the demand that one's moral convictions be relevant to others and the sequestering of moral convictions entirely to oneself (somewhat like matters of taste). Gandhi did this by employing the notion of the exemplar. I have argued above that Gandhian *ahimsa* was consistent with moral criticism and belief in the possibility of sharing fundamental moral convictions. Gandhi accepted objective moral truths without being philosophically interested in their strict universalizability. Gandhi can be interpreted as concerned about the self-righteousness involved in making a demand for the

universalizability of one's own moral judgement to others in relevantly similar circumstances. It is possible to conceive that moral smugness can be as much of an enemy to human goodness as being a "skulker" (Bilgrami 2011, p. 100) in moral matters. This is precisely the problem with Bilgrami's hypothesis about Gandhi and exemplarity. It fails to take account of the problems of moral smugness that may be implicit in the idea that one's individual moral judgements set moral examples for others. Since Gandhi understood egoism/absence of humility as the chief obstacle in leading a good human life, he could not have thought that every *satyagrahi* must see himself as an exemplar. (This it may be recalled is what Bilgrami says Gandhi thought.) Gandhi for instance argued:

> Humility should make the possessor *realize,* that he is as nothing. Directly we imagine ourselves to be something, there is egotism. If a man who keeps observances is proud of keeping them, they will lose much, if not all of their value. And a man who is proud of his virtue often becomes a curse to society. Society will not appreciate it, and he himself will fail to reap any benefit from it (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol. VI, p. 142).

Far from believing that his moral judgements were setting moral examples for others Gandhi was painfully aware of his own limitations and "Himalayan blunders" (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol. VI, p. 95) in moral matters: "Let no one say he is a follower of Gandhi. It is enough that I should be my own follower. I know what an inadequate follower I am of myself, for I cannot live up to the convictions I stand for" (Bose 1948, *Introduction*: p. viii).

Though there was no simplifying the individual moral life, Gandhi did believe in fundamental moral truths which could ensure the possibilities of closure in moral arguments. Section 3.3 addresses Bilgrami's contention that Gandhi had a relativist and an "experiential" (Bilgrami 2011, p. 98) understanding of truth.

3.3 Gandhi and Relativism About Truth

Professor Bilgrami has argued that Gandhi's understanding of *ahimsa* lead him to "the separability of moral value and judgement from moral principle and moral criticism" (Bilgrami 2006, p. 261). Bilgrami realizes that this in turn might lead to the "worry" that as a result of such a separation "truth then drops out of the Gandhian picture in a way that seems un-Gandhian" (2006, p. 261). He argues that as a matter of fact this worry is philosophically unfounded as far as Gandhi is concerned "…since truth in the first place is not, for Gandhi, a notion independent of what his argument rests on, the nature of our own experience of moral value". What this means is that "truth for Gandhi is not a *cognitive* notion at all" (Bilgrami 2006, p. 261). Gandhi had no understanding of truth in the sense of getting things right about the world. "For him truth's relationship to virtue cannot consist at all in the supposed virtue of acquiring truths of this kind; it is instead entirely to be understood in how truth surfaces in our practical and moral relations" (Bilgrami 2006, p. 263). Bilgrami quotes Gandhi's statements offering his reading of the Jain doctrines of *anekantavada* and *syadvada* as evidence of a Gandhian subjectivism

about truth. According to him, "…Gandhi is saying clearly that it is a matter of his *experience* that he is always true from his point of view …. If truth is a predicate of one's experiences, not of propositions, the subjectivism becomes more believable" (Bilgrami 2011, p. 96).

It can of course be philosophically expedient if Gandhi is taken to be a thorough going relativist about truth. For then, Gandhi can be understood as consistent in countenancing a "world of diverse personal religious and moral commitments" (Bilgrami 2011, p. 96). This is obviously philosophically advantageous given that Gandhi was sensitive to religious pluralism.

However, there are also several problems that may be posed by the reconstruction of Gandhi as being relativist and subjectivist about truth. One such problem, as already noted, has to do with Gandhi's engagements in debates about moral truths. A case in point is his long debate with Tagore. Another problem is that being a relativist about truth means denying the possibilities of closure in arguments about moral value. In such a view as everyone experiences truth from their own point of view, we can never really conclude moral arguments. Yet, one can argue that Gandhian *satyagraha* as a methodology of resistance to what one perceives to be wrong, immoral, unjust was based precisely on the possibilities of such moral closure: "*Satyagraha* is a relentless search for truth and a determination to reach truth " (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol. VI, p. 185). Such *satyagraha* as a search for truth (it may be recalled) called forth penance/*tapasya* to the point of death in order that the truth can be arrived at and the conflict comes to a non-violent end. This would make no sense if Gandhi thought that truth was a prisoner of individual moral experiences and that there could be no objective truth which conflicting parties could share. Again another set of serious problems from interpreting Gandhian truth as primarily relativist can come from Gandhi's own oft declared statements distinguishing between relative truth and Absolute Truth/God. If Gandhi really believed that truth was only a matter of individual moral experience, his distinction between relative truths and an absolute truth towards which human beings *qua* moral subjects progressively aspire would be inconsistent.

However, Professor Bilgrami's argument about relativism could find philosophical support in Gandhi's emphasis on the practice of virtues. For if Gandhi believed in virtues as the primary focus of the moral life, then he would admit that such virtues are based in local traditions and that there can be no objective standard of ethical evaluation. The purpose of this section is to establish that Gandhi had an argument to connect the practice of virtue with a belief in objective moral truths. Gandhi thought that the practice of virtues was a means to take the moral aspirant closer to truth as the *telos* of a good human life. Gandhi could combine a certain relativism about religious truths with an objective notion of absolute truth because, (in his view), to insist on one set of virtues as the only proper one could be the effect of collective egoism. Such egoism could inspire its own set of delusions.

Gandhi believed that there was no incompatibility between basing an ethical theory on the virtues (which may be variously conceived in different traditions) and defending the objectivity of fundamental moral truths. It may be recalled that in the previous section, I had reconstructed the Gandhian distinction between relative and

fundamental moral truths as being that between maxims that may be purely contextual and objective moral truths that can be shared. Hence, for Gandhi different religions might emphasize various maxims as contextual moral rules—these could be emphasized as varying lists of virtues, different rules of conduct, etc. These could be valid contextually for moral aspirants within those communities and yet there would be no inconsistency in accepting that these different communities could share certain fundamental moral convictions. For Gandhi, truth and *ahimsa* were fundamental moral convictions.

In this context, one may note, that Bilgrami's retrospective doubt about the nature of truth, had once been raised as a question, to Gandhi. An interrogator had asked him;

> "Should we not confine our pursuit of Truth to ourselves and not press it upon the world, because we know that it is ultimately limited in character?" Gandhi had responded to this question in the following words: "You cannot so circumscribe Truth even if you try. Every expression of Truth has in it the seeds of propagation, even as the sun cannot hide its light." (Bose 1948, p. 20).

This Gandhian insistence on the self-luminosity of Truth seems to bring out a valuable insight which is present in the Platonic myth. This is simply that the idea of the good is the source of the light which reveals to us all things as they really are. Such a Gandhian insistence on truth as self-propagating reveals the deep philosophical limitations of any attempt to reconstruct Gandhi as being a relativist about Truth.

Gandhi was fairly clear that a notion of truth as the *telos* of individual moral life and of non-violence as the means is justifiable in terms of features of human experience that can be shared across different local traditions of virtues. Gandhi said that: "What distinguishes him [man] from the brute is his ceaseless striving to rise above the brute on the moral plane" (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol. VI, p. 111). In this context, Gandhi argued that *ahimsa* as the path to absolute truth was the law of human life itself and came from being human as opposed to brutes: "Non-violence is the law of the human race and is infinitely greater than and superior to brute force" (Bose 1948, p. 154).

> The sum total of the experiences of mankind is that men somehow or other live on. From which fact I infer that it is the Law of Love that rules mankind. Had violence i.e., hate, ruled us, we should have become extinct long ago. And yet the tragedy of it is that the so-called civilized men and nations conduct themselves as if the basis of society was violence .... Much evidence to the contrary cannot shake my faith (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol. VI, p. 160).

A serious argument in support of Bilgrami's reconstruction of Gandhi as being primarily relativist and subjectivist about truth can come from Gandhi's insistence on remaining open about the possibilities of being mistaken oneself and of finding truth in the position of the opposing other. This modesty in Gandhi was built into his conception that the *satyagrahi* must be willing to transform his/her position in the interest of truth. He said:

> I very much like this doctrine of the manyness of reality .... Formerly I used to resent the ignorance of my opponents. Today I can love them because I am gifted with the eye to see myself as others see me and vice versa. My *Anekantavada* is the result of the twin doctrines of *satya* and *ahimsa* (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol. VI, pp. 107–108).

Gandhi's understanding that the practice of *ahimsa* involves an ability to see oneself as the conflicting "other" see's one means that the demands of moral realism require modesty/the suppression of the egoistic preoccupation with the self. With the absence of egoism, one begins to see how things really are from outside one's own interests. This means nothing more that the ability to see things and oneself as they are as a matter of fact and therefore partly as others see them. This is the true significance of Gandhian *ahimsa.Anekantavada* for Gandhi meant the ability to step away from the self and see things as "others" saw them. To begin with this could lead a moral aspirant to the manyness of reality but it did not (for Gandhi) mean that things did not as a matter of fact exist as they really did outside the egoistic readings of any/all individual agents. So Gandhi re-read the ancient story of the blind men and the elephant:

> The seven blind men who gave seven different descriptions of the elephant were all right from their respective points of view, and wrong from the point of view of one another, and right and wrong from the point *of the man who knew the elephant* (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol. VI, p. 107, emphasis is mine).

For Gandhi, while everyone follows the truth as he/she sees it there are possibilities of stepping outside one's several self-directed points of views and seeing things *as they really are as a matter of fact*. Such correctness of vision can be shared across individual experiences and occasions right conduct. One of Gandhi's concerns had been the moral criticism of institutions, modernity and science as unjust/repressive or in other ways incompatible with fundamental moral truths. He resisted others for what he saw were mistaken positions. Truth and *ahimsa* (as the means to truth) then provided Gandhi with an objective standard for the possibilities of criticism resistance and the non-violent closure of moral arguments. Of course the fact that Gandhi believed in Absolute Truth, objective moral truths and possibilities of moral closure of debates only shows that Bilgrami might be mistaken about Gandhi being a relativist about truth. It does not make what Gandhi believes in any sense correct. But it does make that a plausible candidate for the truth and one deserving some serious scrutiny.

3.4 Gandhi's Truth: Both Cognitive and Experiential

All through this rather long argument I have been emphasizing that goodness for Gandhi consisted in a sort of moral realism and ability to step away from the self and see things as they really are. This implies that for Gandhi there was "*a value or virtue* in getting things right about the world" (Bilgrami 2006, p. 263). However, Professor Bilgrami argues that Gandhi rejected the enlightenment paradigm at a conceptual level by rejecting a purely cognitive notion of truth. Gandhi believed in truth as "an exclusively and exhaustively moral and experiential notion" (2006, p. 261). Bilgrami argues that Gandhi simply was not interested in how things really were but only in how an individual experienced them morally.

The debate between Gandhi and Tagore poses a philosophical challenge to such an interpretation. This is on account of the fact that the debate can be philosophically reconstructed as having been primarily about truth, possibilities of untruth and the nature of freedom/*swarajya.* Tagore and Gandhi both thought of colonial India's struggle for freedom as a quest for truth. On this view, the individual Indian had to be free to pursue truth in belief, judgement and in action. Gandhi argued that truth could only be arrived at by the practice of *ahimsa*/non-violence and the other *yama*s recommended by Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra*. Tagore countered this argument and said that not "*some mantra*" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 78) but the uncoerced individual freedom to think was the means to truth. Interestingly, both Tagore and Gandhi made connections between truth and freedom. Though they each understood the connection between truth and freedom in very much their own ways the fact that they made this connection kept them in a sort of continuity with classical Indian metaphysics. The traditional schools of Indian philosophy (whether *āstika* or *nāstika*) had equated spiritual freedom with truth. Tagore made a connection between truth and individual freedom when he declared: "Freedom is true when it is a revelation of truth" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 60). Gandhi also understood individual freedom as a freedom to pursue a life of truth. Consequently, Gandhian *swaraj*/freedom was conceived primarily as moral self-rule or freedom from the demands of the inauthentic life.

Tagore and Gandhi related individual freedom to the pursuit of truth because they thought truth was both experiential and cognitive. Truth was not only a property of propositions describing reality but also a property of the individual's moral and practical experience of reality. Since there was inevitably an experiential element in getting things right about the world freedom from self-deception was an essential condition of authentic belief formation and action. An individual's experience of matters of fact could go astray by deceptions caused by her own self as much as by others. Consequently, Gandhi laid emphasis on individual freedom as *swarajya* or moral self-rule. Interestingly, Tagore shared Gandhi's understanding of truth as both cognitive and experiential. However, he understood the individual's freedom to experience matters of fact and arrive at truth as primarily a freedom in the mind. This meant the individual's freedom to reason (reminiscent of Kant's freedom in the public use of reason).

One might of course ask in what sense Tagore and Gandhi invoked truth? Truth had been understood in Indian metaphysics as *sat*/absolute reality. In the context of the national movement and this debate, it appears apparent that truth was being understood in terms closer to ordinary human life and its concerns. Truth has been understood in analytic philosophy and epistemology as a property of propositions and as a primarily cognitive notion. Russell for instance has argued that facts are genuinely what would make our beliefs and claims true or false (Russell 2014, p. 103). In this view, the world contains facts which are what they are whatever we may choose to think about them and of course there are beliefs which have reference to facts and by reference to facts they are either true or false. John Searle expands the notion of facts by including social facts/institutional reality (Searle 2014, p. 110). Social facts are there not just because you interact with other people

but because you interact with aspects of reality that are there partly because of what other people say they are—on account of "collective acceptance or recognition by the individuals acting collectively…" (2014, p. 110). The idea that the collective acceptance of a status function forms the basic conceptual structure behind human institutional reality is significant. Truth as institutional reality is a product of the relationship between individuals and brute facts. Searle speaks of this relationship as "intentionality" (2014, p. 109).

When Gandhi spoke of truth, he understood it as a product of the relationship between the individual and matters of fact. He understood that relationship in terms of an individual's moral and practical relationships with herself, with "others", and with reality. Gandhi was interested in getting things right about the world but he thought that the experience of truth as a moral value was significantly related to getting things right about the world. This is why (for instance) he thought that moral considerations mattered to economic truths. It is possible to say then that Gandhi understood truth as both experiential and cognitive. Gandhi's divergence from the enlightenment paradigm was simply that the enlightenment paradigm had assumed that there could be a *purely* cognitive understanding of how things are without allowing for our moral and practical relations to matters of fact. Gandhi's notion of truth was constituted by how things really were i.e., matters of fact and by *our moral and practical relations* with those matters of fact.

This argument might seem to be contrary to an understanding of Gandhi's truth as only experiential. Professor Bilgrami has argued, for instance, that for Gandhi it is not propositions purporting to describe the world of which truth is predicated. It is only our own moral experience which is capable of being true. If truth is an exhaustively experiential and moral notion when we pursue truth we are only pursuing a moral value. On this interpretation of Gandhi's truth, there is no cognitive value to truth for him—no value in *getting things right* about the world. The reason I bring this up here is because the debate between Gandhi and Tagore was about truth. This meant that both of them thought that what was at issue *was* getting things right about the world.

It becomes important at this point to ask if Gandhi really believed that there could be a *purely* moral experience of truth independent of how things were as a *matter of fact*? One could for example think of Gandhian truth as a sort of spiritual experience in a private world necessarily inaccessible to others. Others could not share such individual truth they could only be persuaded to follow its example. Yet, Gandhi gave much importance to understanding how things really were and transforming them in line with moral insights; this, for instance, was often his point when he spoke about the inseparability of morality from politics and economics: "True economics never militates against the highest ethical standard, just as all true ethics to be worth its name must at the same time be also good economics…" (Bose 1948, p. 39). If Gandhi was not interested in propositions being true about the world why did he think that true ethics must be good economics? One can recall here that, for Gandhi, one was not a good person if one was dressed in finery apparently ignorant of the abject poverty of one's neighbours. This after all was the Gandhian point of everyone voluntarily dressing in hand-spun *khadi.* This also explains why

Gandhi believed in *charkha*/spinning as a form of bread labour and a fundamental moral/economic principle.

It seems clear that for Gandhi there could be no moral experience of truth which was not at the same time also an experience of how things really were in the world as a matter of fact: "I do not believe that the spiritual law works on a field of its own. On the contrary, it expresses itself only through the ordinary activities of life. It thus affects the economic, the social and the political fields" (Bose 1948, p. 24).

Bilgrami finds it odd that Gandhi should have rejected what he calls a propositional/cognitive understanding of truth for as he argues: "There is a palpable mistake in collapsing the cognitive value of truth into the moral value of truth-telling, a mistake evident in the fact that somebody who *fails* to *tell* the truth can, in doing so, still value *truth*" (Bilgrami 2006, p. 263). On this view both the truthful man and the liar share in valuing truth itself though the liar has a "*moral* failing" (Bilgrami 2006, p. 263) in that he disvalues "truth-telling" (Bilgrami 2006, p. 263). What the liar values in truth therefore cannot be a moral value. In addition to the moral value in truth which the truthful man values, there must also be a value in getting things right. This is what both the liar and the man of truth share in valuing. It is only the "bullshitter" (Bilgrami 2006, p. 264) or "the person who merely sounds off on public occasions …. *without any goal of getting things right*…" (Bilgrami 2006, p. 264) who does not value truth in a cognitive sense. In terms of this argument, Gandhi (if he completely rejected the value of getting things right about the world) would be, like a man in a dream or a yogi in a meditative trance, simply interested in how he individually experienced truth. While this may be different from the "bullshitter" (Bilgrami 2006, p. 264) who disvalued both cognitive truth and the value of truth-telling, how much different would this be? For, in this context, truth-telling would only mean representing one's own private experience of things faithfully, without any interest, in getting things right as a matter of fact.

One can of course ask what could be inconsistent between being in a dream world characterized by *private experiences* of truth and human goodness. The answer might be that there is nothing to prevent dream worlds/meditative trances from becoming havens of self-projective fantasies. Since it is the task of one's individual/collective ego to show oneself in the best possible light, it becomes necessary to show everyone and everything else as somehow worse than oneself. This means that in a dream world, it is possible to keep how things are as a matter of fact at a significant distance. It also means that one may not only think in fantasy but act out of beliefs inspired by one's own superiority in character and by what one wants to believe with no knowledge of what others may be like outside of our own interests in ourselves. However, for Gandhi, any sort of self-projection including those of moral superiority were the prime enemies of the good human life. For him, self-projective dream worlds were the source of much wrong doing and sin. Gandhi believed that if the so-called opponent could be helped to see the truth or if the moral aspirant could come out of ego inspired untruths, there would be some convergence on the truth or how things really are outside the demands of individual egos. The only way for this to happen was to dismantle pride, self-concern and egoism. In other words to develop *ahimsa* as humility/egolessness in the search for

truth. It is possible to argue that for Gandhi there could be no sense of a self-driven purely individual and exclusively moral experience of truth. On the contrary, Gandhi's truth primarily involved seeing things as they are with as little of the self as possible.

Bilgrami's reconstruction of Gandhi's truth could itself amount to another "spectacular misreading" (Bilgrami 2006, p. 252) of Gandhi. He seems to have interpreted Gandhi as primarily opposed to a Kantian tradition in moral philosophy with which Gandhi might not be philosophically well acquainted. While Gandhi rejected the strict universalizability of moral principles, he accepted the possibilities both of settled moral convictions and criticism as consistent with *ahimsa.* This made it possible for him to have a notion of an objective *telos* of moral life as Truth/God. Gandhi engaged in debates about moral truths with Tagore across the pages of national dailies simply because he believed in the possibilities of closure in arguments about the truth. The debate with Tagore might be of greater philosophical importance to a reconstruction of Gandhi's position, on moral judgement and moral truth, than has so far been understood. It plays a philosophical role in countering philosophical misrepresentations of Gandhi of the sort I have considered in this chapter.

Chapter 4 examines Tagore's arguments about the possibilities of untruth, which were implicit in Gandhi's insistence upon fundamental moral truths.

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Chapter 4
Tagore: On the Possibilities of Untruth and Moral Tyranny

Abstract This chapter brings out Tagore's insights about the possibilities of untruth in Gandhi's conception of the *proper* means to truth. Tagore raised four serious concerns—*uncritical* self-assurance about the truth of particular moral convictions, demand for unquestioned individual obedience to moral rules, the ascetic denial of ordinary life and possibilities of self-mortification in Gandhi's fasts. For Tagore, another powerful source of untruth came from the appropriation of the unique individual into the collective. This chapter also examines Martha Nussbaum's enlistment of Tagore on the side of cosmopolitanism. It argues that Tagore cannot be described either as a cosmopolitan or as a nationalist.

Keywords Untruth · Collective · Moral tyranny · Experiments · Cosmopolitanism · *Varna*

At one level, the debate between Gandhi and Tagore was about a disparate set of issues. These included Gandhi's equation of spinning with *swaraj*/freedom, the non-cooperation movement and the associated boycott of educational institutions, *swadeshi* and the burning of foreign cloth, and the possibilities of martyrdom in Gandhi's practice of fasting. However, it is possible that Tagore's exchanges with Gandhi did not constitute a set of disconnected arguments. These arguments could be interpreted as Tagore's efforts to articulate his insights about the possibilities of untruth in Gandhi's conception of the *proper* means to the truth/*satya*. One can argue that the debate took place because as a litterateur, Tagore had a deeper understanding of the myriad possibilities of self-deception and sources of untruth that could envelop an individual life and search for truth. He recognized that disguised forms of self-assertion (individual/collective) could obstruct the rigorous purity of Gandhi's efforts to overcome untruth by moral self-rule/*swarajya.* On Tagore's view, self-assertions in the guise of self-mastery would only confirm an individual and society in a life pervaded by all kinds of untruth.

Tagore argued that the various forms of individual self-denial advocated by Gandhi—in the moral life, in the cult of the nation and in asceticism—could in themselves be insidious forms of self-interest. Gandhi's efforts at overcoming an assertive sense of self in *swaraj* as moral self-mastery and home rule could in itself

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be a deceptive form of self-love and thereby become an obstruction to the truth. For Tagore, it was on account of the "egoistic self" that "our friendships become exclusive, our families selfish and inhospitable, and our nations insular and aggressively inimical to other races" (Tagore 2012d, p. 93). As brought out in Chap. 3 of this book, Gandhi and Tagore thought that truth was both a cognitive and an experiential notion. Tagore (like Gandhi) believed that truth described an individual's state of being which reflected her progressive awareness of how things really were in the world independently of self-/ego-driven projects. In Tagore's understanding, deceptions caused by self-assertion could obstruct an individual's progress to truth and such deceptions would lead an individual into both untruth and a loss of freedom.

In this context it can be philosophically useful to read the Gandhi–Tagore debate, not only in terms of the actual exchanges between them, but also as informed by the plays and novels Tagore wrote at the time he was engaged in writing letters to Gandhi. For it was in his novels and plays that Tagore explored (at his best) the possibilities of untruth (or of insidious sorts of ego-driven self-love) that he saw in Gandhi's methods to overcome untruth.

This chapter and the next reconstruct the debate between Gandhi and Tagore as being primarily about the difficult nature of untruth and the proper means to become established in a state of truth *qua* freedom or *swaraj*. While the present chapter reconstructs Tagore's arguments about the possibilities of untruth in Gandhian movements and methods, the next puts together Tagore's alternative understanding of the nature of freedom/*swaraj*. It is necessary to anticipate in brief the arguments of Chap. 5 here. For Tagore's understanding of individual freedom as primarily the freedom to reason influenced his conception of the proper means to the truth. This understanding put him at some intellectual distance from Gandhi.

4.1 The Relationship Between Individual Freedom, Reason and Rationality

Tagore thought about individual freedom primarily as a freedom in the mind that is as a freedom to reason. During the debate with Gandhi he argued that an individual's freedom to think was the chief means of experiencing truth and becoming free of deceptions. Tagore's objection to the national movement organized under Gandhi was precisely, that the assumption into a homogenized self, denied the individual a right to reason and to differ from others.

Tagore's understanding of individual freedom can be reconstructed along the lines of Kant's essay on the Enlightenment.Kant had defined Enlightenment as a human being's "emergence from his self-incurred minority." By minority/immaturity Kant meant the individual's reliance on external variables rather than on his/her own understanding. For Tagore, the "immaturity" from which the agent has to emerge leads to the very same factor that "liberates" the Western rational self,

i.e. having reasons for what one believes to be true and for how one acts. The Kantian agent is marked as "distinct" from the "thing" only by the virtue of her rationality. It is this rationality that guarantees the freedom of the will which, in turn, makes possible the agent's detachment from all sorts of natural desires/ inclinations and makes her at home in the world of the truth. It can be argued that Tagore's conception of individual freedom is philosophically close to Kant and the Enlightenment. However, though Tagore certainly seemed to have been influenced by the Enlightenment he cannot be entirely understood along Kantian lines. An important difference emerges if one tries to unpack what Tagore meant by emphasizing the individual's freedom to reason. I suggest that the freedom to reason/in the mind, that Tagore argued about, can be philosophically interpreted by taking a clue from Derek Parfit's conception of the individual's freedom to respond to reasons in forming her beliefs and in acting in a certain way (Parfit 2013, p. 47). Tagore argued that the primary sense of individual freedom was that individual man *qua* man must be free to respond to reasons or apparent reasons.

It is important to reconstruct Tagore's understanding of the relationship between an individual's free response to reasons and her rationality as a human being *qua* human being. Tagore accorded priority to the individual's freedom to understand and respond to reasons rather than to an a priori conception of rationality as a differentiating feature of a human being *qua* human being. It may be recalled that for Kant both the authority and the content of the categorical imperative are to be understood with reference to the requirements of rational agency rather than to some independent conception of the reasons that people have for what they believe in and do. In Tagore claims about the individual's freedom to respond to reasons (what he calls freedom in the mind) is not grounded on any commitment to a prior claim about rational agency. Therefore, there is no commitment to any Kantian conception of universal reason. Individual freedom to respond to reasons is more fundamental than any claims of human rationality and universal reason.

It is important to raise the point about Tagore's understanding of the relationship between individual reasons and rationality here. Section 4.4.2 examines the debate between Nussbaum and her critics on patriotism and cosmopolitanism. In that debate Nussbaum draws on (what she understands to be) Tagore's commitment to a cosmopolitanism based on the idea of universal reason. In terms of my argument, Tagore insisted on the individual's freedom to respond to reason without being committed to any prior understanding of the claims of individual rational agency or of universal reason. Understood in this way, judgements about reasons are independent of judgements about universal reason. In Tagore's view we are rational when we do not believe blindly/obey passionately but respond to reason or apparent reason. Our acts are rational when, if our beliefs are true, we would be doing what we had good reasons to do.

This discussion on the priority of reasons in Tagore should not be taken to mean that he could be unreflectively called a modern. Though he was powerfully influenced by central ideas of the Enlightenment, Tagore cannot be easily called a product of the Enlightenment. His insistence that nature was alive and essentially independent of man and even of God kept him at some distance from the

anthropocentricism of modernity. As he had declared in essays called "Sādhanā" he shared India's ancient rejection of the essentially modern "anthropomorphic hallucination" (Tagore 2012e, p. 88) of seeing man as the centre of the universe. To some extent this brought him closer to Gandhi. In their respect for the integrity of nature both Gandhi and Tagore shared the cosmological commitments of the ancients as they negotiated with Western modernity. Chapter 6 examines the shared intellectual spaces between the two.

4.1.1 Man Against the Background of the Whole: Not Alone

As brought out in the first section of this chapter, Tagore can be read as philosophically close to Kant and the Western Enlightenment. Chapter 5 in this book will reconstruct Tagore's notion of individual freedom along Kantian lines. In the debate with Gandhi, Tagore argued that uncoerced individual freedom to think was the primary means to arrive at truth and thereby become free*/swarajya*. This could lead one to believe that (unlike Gandhi) Tagore had a purely cognitive understanding of truth. For Gandhi (as I argued in Chap. 3) truth is not only a property of propositions. Truth is significantly related to an individual's moral and practical *experience* of reality (Bilgrami 2011, p. 96). As I argued in Chap. 3, Gandhi thought of truth as both a cognitive and experiential notion. Tagore also understood truth (along Gandhian lines) as related to matters of fact and to the individual truth seeker's moral and practical relationships with those matters of fact. This becomes evident from his literary and poetical compositions where he often explored the individual's journey out of self-deception and towards truth. In Tagore's plays such as *The King of the Dark Chamber* (Tagore 2012a) and *The Kingdom of Cards* (Tagore 1933/2011), the protagonist's arriving at truth was understood as an individual experience of becoming free (both from individual self-deceptions and collectively shared conventional beliefs) and thereby getting in touch with *how things really were* in the world. During the course of the debate with Gandhi he said (at many places) that truth could be understood as a state of being which was opposed to the state of *maya* or deception/ignorance. "*Maya* is like darkness…. Truth is like a lamp; even as it is lit, *maya* vanishes" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 70). In Tagore's view, *maya*/ignorance was intimately linked to self-deception. While ignorance could certainly be the result of a confusion of ideas, it was almost always a product of egoistic self-preoccupation and an inward-looking vision. Tagore argued that *maya* could completely distort the truth when it was associated with individual passion, for "we fix our attention exclusively…, by reason of some infatuation—be it of love or hate" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 70).

As brought out in Chap. 3, both Tagore and Gandhi related truth to freedom. Freedom, it may be recalled, was a central issue in the debate between them. It is worthwhile to recall Isaiah Berlin's warning against accepting "Voltaire's conception of enlightenment as being identical in essentials wherever it is attained" (Putnam 2002, p. 96) The truth of Berlin's observation is brought home when

Tagore connects freedom as the individual's freedom to reason with the ancient Indian *upaniṣadic* idea that ignorance is a form of bondage. For Tagore it was only the free exercise of individual reason which led to the dispersal of self-deceptions and thereby to an experience of freedom from *maya*/ignorance which was responsible for various forms of bondage. It was in this strain that Tagore argued (Tagore 2010, p. 360): "In a spiritual sense India said one day that ignorance is bondage, knowledge is deliverance, and we free ourselves by attaining truth". In Tagore it was the freedom to reason which took an individual progressively closer to how things really were and towards more authentic moral and practical relationships with reality.

Tagore went on to say "What is untruth? It is to know one self as integrally separate" (2010, p. 361). Though Tagore said that an egoistic sense of individual separateness is a powerful source of untruth, he was not thereby intending to reiterate any form of *advaita* non-dualism (nor any colourless cosmopolitanism for that matter) simply because he believed in the absolute worth of the unique individual. He insisted that "a single individual … has no duplicate in the whole universe…. We are absolutely bankrupt if we are deprived of this speciality, this individuality, which is the only thing we can call our own; and which, if lost, is also a loss to the whole world" (Tagore 2012d, p. 117). In Tagore's understanding, the truth of the universe did not lie in obliteration of difference but in obliteration of selfishness and attainment of a harmony of interrelationship between unique individual's, nature and divinity. Between 1912 and 1913, Tagore wrote a series of essays called "Sādhanā" where he put forth (what may be described as) a premodern metaphysics. In his understanding of the universe, man could only be thought against the vastness of the cosmos, "the background of the whole" (Tagore 2012d, p. 80). In this view, nature was seen as distinct from both the many unique individuals and divinity. Nature, in fact, constituted the significant *third* as the meeting place of man and God. This was why (as Tagore argued) the forest had so exalted a place in the Indian conception of the contemplative life/*sannyasa*. As he put it, forests/nature had "a sacred association in the hearts of men as the site of some great spiritual reconcilement where man's soul had its meeting-place with the soul of the world" (Tagore 2012d, p. 81). Consequently, for him: "The state of realizing our relationship with all… was… to be the ultimate end and fulfilment of humanity" (2012d, p. 84).

Tagore pointed out that individual human beings, nature and the divinity were in a harmonious interrelationship, each uniquely individual and yet not separate, but interconnected. Consequently, "The power and freedom conferred by truth" was to be equally "shared by all" (Tagore 2010, p. 362). It was in this context that Tagore's arguments against patriotism and nationalism are to be located. For Tagore, individual or collective egoism/nationalism could not constitute "true freedom" (Bhattacharya 2008, p. 60). For such collective, shared egoism went against the truth of the universe which was that of the coexistence of difference without an exaggerated sense of individual self-concern. Being free of an exaggerated sense of self would lead an individual (not to oneness but) to an understanding of the truth of

coexistence despite differences, and thereby, to harmony between different individuals and groups.

In this chapter, I argue that the debate between Gandhi and Tagore was not so much about the nature of truth but about the nature and myriad possibilities of untruth. Tagore was seeking an answer to what he saw as the fundamental question: "what is untruth?" (Tagore 2010, p. 361). Tagore's arguments at different stages of the exchange with Gandhi were meant to articulate his insights that there could be many possibilities of untruth/ignorance/deception in the moral purity of the Gandhian means to overcome untruth.

Section 4.2 discusses some of the possibilities of untruth that Tagore saw in the Gandhian insistence on moral purity, the single-minded demand for obedience to moral rules/*mantras* and the denial of ordinary life. However, for Tagore the most powerful source of untruth (and thereby loss of individual freedom) came from the appropriation of the unique individual into an abstraction—the collective. Section 4.4 examines Tagore's arguments against collectives. It looks very specifically at Tagore's criticism of nation and patriotism as the chief ideological assumptions of Gandhi's non-cooperation movement.

4.2 On the Myriad Possibilities of Self-concern in *Mantras* and Martyrdom

Tagore raised four serious concerns about the possibilities of untruth in the Gandhian means to arrive at the truth and thereby find individual freedom. Gandhi had reconstructed individual freedom primarily as moral self-mastery/*swarajya*. The individual moral life was understood as a quest for truth as the *telos* of the good human life. In his debate with Gandhi, Tagore addressed the possibilities of untruth in Gandhi's reconstruction of the individual's moral life primarily in terms of an obedience to moral rules/convictions. In this context one can recall Bernard Williams' distinction between the terms *ethical a*nd *moral*: "One difference is that the latin term from which "moral" comes emphasizes rather more the sense of social expectation, while the Greek favours that of individual character" (Williams 2006, p. 6). Williams says that ".... I am going to suggest that morality should be understood as a particular development of the ethical, one that has special significance in modern Western culture. It peculiarly emphasizes certain ethical notions rather than others, developing in particular a special notion of obligation..." (Williams 2006, p. 6). Tagore made four arguments about the possibilities of untruth in Gandhi's understanding of *swaraj* as moral self-mastery. In reconstructing these arguments I prefer to use the term *moral.* This is on account of the fact that while Tagore was not aware of any distinction (as that made by Williams) between the terms *moral* and *ethical*, his arguments are philosophically sensitive to the associations that Gandhi made between the *moral* and the idea of unconditional obligation/duty. Tagore made the following points:

1. Gandhi had argued that taking vows/*vrata*s strengthened the individual's will to follow select moral convictions. In Gandhi's view, this led the individual towards freedom from the egoistic, desire-driven self and the progressive ability to get in touch with matters of fact. For Tagore, the self-assurance in Gandhi's recommendation of an unquestioned obedience to Patañjali's vows/*vrata*s as the only means of overcoming untruth, in itself, generated powerful self-deceptions.
2. Gandhi's argument that obeying certain moral principles (as unquestioned *mantras*) was the chief means of reaching truth was based on the notion of uncritical obedience. Unquestioned obedience (whether individual or collective) meant the a priori denial of the possibilities of an individual's freedom to respond to/rationally interrogate her reasons for moral convictions. Consequently, for Tagore any uncritical/blind obedience to moral rules could become a powerful source of untruth in human life.
3. The Gandhian reconstruction of the moral life in strongly ascetic terms of self-denial as the only path to truth/*swaraj* was an untruth, for it obstructed an individual's access to truth by restricting her natural freedom to engage with the different aspects of ordinary life.
4. Lastly (for Tagore), Gandhi's fasts concealed a deceptive (and possibly egoistic) desire for martyrdom. Such martyrdom, as an egoistic celebration of the annihilation of the supremely sacrificing self, concealed frightening possibilities of self-deceptions.

4.2.1 Of Ethical Self-assuredness

For Tagore, it was Gandhi's *uncritical* self-assurance about the truth of particular moral convictions that could lead an individual into a life of untruth. There were two kinds of moral rules that Gandhi had invoked as (described by Tagore) "some *mantra,* some unreasoned creed!" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 78): One, Patañjali's *yama/niyama* which Gandhi termed "cardinal" and "casual" virtues, which an individual could practise by taking *vrata*s/vows. These were seen to be absolutely necessary to the individual's moral life and search for truth. The first five *yama*s were truth, non-violence, non-stealing, non-possession and celibacy. While Tagore thought that the selection of all the traditional *vrata*s as individual vows was ethically arbitrary, he found the last two *yama*s especially disturbing. He connected them with an extreme form of asceticism. The second kind of moral rules to which Gandhi referred could be described as subjective codes of conduct but it would be necessary to add a caveat. These were not subjective in the sense that they were valid only for the individual subject (if she so chose), but in the sense that they were powerfully contextual. In the particular situation of Indians struggling against colonialism, these rules were seen as necessary and universally obligatory for all Indians. Chief among these were Gandhian principles such as "spinning for *swaraj*", the wearing of *khadi*, the advocacy of *swadeshi* and the related burning of

foreign cloth. Tagore had two arguments against Gandhi's self-assured advocacy of such rules.

Firstly, for him the Gandhian self-assurance about the truth of *particular* vows/ moral convictions was a moral self-confidence in the absolute nature of certain selective moral truths to the exclusion of all others. The basis of such an exclusionary selection and confidence could only be the received nature of the vows as traditional and/or Gandhi's own very individual insight into the truth of his moral convictions. Both of these grounds were equally egoistic and could lead to untruth. Tagore argued: "The man who aims at his own aggrandizement underrates everything else. Compared with himself the rest of the world is unreal" (Tagore 2012d, p. 87). Significantly for Tagore individual or collective self-assurance could be a concealed form of self-assertion. In the context of tradition/collective self-assurance as a ground of the obligatory status of *vrata*s and other Gandhian convictions, Tagore cautioned Indians against surrendering their "greatest right, the right to reason and to judge" for oneself "to the blind forces of *shastric* injunctions and social conventions" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 76). A related difficulty (for Tagore) came from the effect of self-assuredness (individual/collective) on the individual moral life. Unquestioned assuredness of the truth of individual convictions conferred a deceptively absolute character to moral truths that might in fact not be believed by dissenting others. Such individual self-assurance made the living of the moral life an extremely inward-looking task. For Tagore, inwardness (whether individual or collective) could easily degenerate into a moral smugness or sense of self-satisfaction. This could become egoistic but more importantly, it could obstruct the plural possibilities of arriving at the truth, that lay outside of an individual/group's strongest ethical convictions. Tagore's novel *Char Adhyaya* (Tagore 2012b) can be read as a literary version of Tagore's conviction that uncritical self-assuredness about what one believes in or what the *guru*/master believes in can destroy the individual's moral life.

The second difficulty was that this Gandhian understanding of the moral life as a life built around a self-assured advocacy of vows and rules transformed morality into a purely mechanical exercise of rule following. This became apparent from the fact that for those who professed to be Gandhians the good human life became unreflectively equated with spinning, *swadeshi,* wearing *khadi* and following the *vrata*s. There was no space in such a life for the role of critical individual reflection in response to the particularity of moral situations. One can reconstruct what seemed (to Tagore) to have been lost by recalling Aristotelian *phronesis*. One way in which *phronesis* can be understood is as the ability of the good man to respond to the particularities of actual moral situations from within the good human life. For Tagore, an individual's moral life could be built around moral convictions and rules but the individual needed to retain the freedom to respond to reasons in particular situations where following rules or keeping vows might appear positively immoral/ wrong to her. In his novel *Gora* (Tagore 2003), Tagore attempts to reconstruct such moral situations. This novel explores an individual's imprisonment in conventional rule following as an imprisonment in untruth by relating the story of the protagonist Gora's life. As that life progresses the hero Gora gradually grows into a freedom in

the mind as he breaks away from his unreflective beliefs in conventional morality and traditional vows.

In Tagore's view, freedom of the mind was a prerequisite of the individual's search for truth. An individual's freedom to reason was also significantly related to her moral experience. In Tagore's understanding of it, the good life was better lived as an exercise of becoming at home in moral practice so that an individual could develop the ability to respond freely to reasons in actual moral situations. In *Gora*, the hero finally appreciated Anandamoyi's (his foster mother) freedom to respond to reasons presented by actual situations characterized by moral conflicts. He understood that her freedom in responding to apparent reasons that conflicted with her conventional beliefs (even though she was otherwise a believer in traditional morality) made for more authentic moral engagements than did his own bureaucratic, rule-abiding morality. This realization leads *Gora* to admit at the end of the story (and his own journey to freedom in the mind): "Mother, you are my mother! …. You have no caste, you make no distinctions, and have no hatred—You are only the image of our welfare! It is you who are India!" (Tagore 2003, p. 784).

The good human life (on this account) was a free unfolding of the individual person by a process of critical self-questioning. Bureaucratic and mechanical conceptions of morality (as an unquestioned rule-abiding) not only restricted individual freedom but contained possibilities of entrapping individuals in untruth. By a dramatic literary manoeuvre at the end of *Gora*, Tagore revealed that the hero (a traditional, rule-abiding Brahmin) was not a Hindu, Brahmin or even an Indian. He was the son of Irish parents abandoned during the mutiny and brought up by Anandamoyi, a Brahmin woman. This truth made Gora's self-assured, rule-abiding morality appear all the more stark in its blatant untruth. In this novel (and elsewhere in the debate with Gandhi), Tagore argued that the good human life flourished only if individual rule-abiding was based on the freedom to engage with moral rules. The free will and the practical (powerfully contextual) judgement of the man living the good life formed the basis of the individual's moral well-being.

It was perhaps in such a context that Tagore had once written to Andrews: "The human soul is God's flower. It gives its best bloom and scent, not when shut up in eager palms to be squeezed, but when left alone in the immense freedom of light and air" (Tagore 2012f, p. 218). In his music, Tagore used metaphors from nature to indicate such an unfolding of the individual self towards truth. He often invoked the idea of the opening of a flower's petals to the light of the sun: "Today spring is at the door lively awake. In your shrouded diffident life; do not let it be disappointed. Today unfold your hearts petals (*aji khulio hridoy-daul khulio*)…. Let rise in waves your own fragrance" (Tagore, in Bardhan 2008, pp. 111–112). Such an opening of the individual self from an entrapment in a self-inwardness that generated untruth was critical (in a Kantian sense), for it involved a rational engagement with both the personal self and with all that lay outside that self's settled convictions.

Tagore understood the individual's moral life not in terms of self-assured rule-abiding but alternatively as a critically spiritual exercise. He interpreted individual spirituality as a process of uncovering the self from the layers of deceptions

engendered by the individual ego and equally by the force of collective social conventions. Self-knowledge as both a rational/critical and a spiritual exercise took the individual towards truth and thereby towards freedom. To Tagore, Gandhi's reconstruction of individual moral life in terms of the following of certain selected moral rules as absolutely true was dissembling.

4.2.2 Of Moral Tyranny and the Demand for Obedience

Tagore interpreted Gandhi's understanding of the good life primarily in terms of unquestioned codes of behaviour and coercive forms of subjectivation. He argued that such an understanding of morality as a system of vows and rules involved the idea of unquestioned individual obedience as the chief form of living the good human life. At one level Gandhi was critical of conventional codes such as the received idea of caste. However, at another level he thought of an individual's moral life as self-mastery understood largely as unquestioned individual obedience to traditional rules such as the *yama*s of Indian philosophy. Implicit in the very concept of a vow or a rule was Gandhi's belief that it must be kept "at any cost" (Gandhi, *From Yeravda Mandir*, in Narayan 1995, vol. IV, p. 249). Tagore argued that such uncritical obedience that was insensitive to moral particularity and context entangled individual life in a web of deceit.

It is not hard to reconstruct Tagore's arguments against uncritical obedience and the possibilities of untruth. In "The Call of Truth" (*ModernReview* 1921), he had argued: "Today in the atmosphere of the country, there is a spirit of persecution, which is not that of armed force but something still more alarming because it is invisible" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 78). This persecution, he explained, came from what he heard "…on every side", "…that reason, and culture as well must be closured. It was only necessary to cling to an unquestioning obedience. Obedience to whom? To some *mantra*, some unreasoned creed!" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 78). He spoke of the deceptions that could be generated at an individual and collective level by the uncritical obedience to *mantras*/unquestioned creeds. The concept of "obedience" implicit in the idea of a *vrata*/vow was in itself against the spirit of enquiry which was essential to overcome deceptions. For, to unravel collective or individual ego-inspired distortions it seems necessary to enter into a process of deeper and deeper self-questioning till one can reach the very basis of our motivations. This process of unravelling the reasons for why one does things, or believes in some moral rule rather than any other, is also the process whereby one reaches the truth of oneself and of the other. To reach the truth is simultaneous to become free from the deceptions which had obstructed that truth.

To begin with, obedience can be demanded by one's own self to one's own moral beliefs as happens when one takes a vow. For example, one might take an individual vow to practise *brahmacharya*/celibacy. However, the situation can become more compelling when an individual's confidence leads her to demand obedience by others in what she believes to be true/morally obligatory. Such a

demand for obedience can come from an individual who assumes the position of a leader/*guru* or by the prominent group in a society. Tagore argued that the very demand for uncritical obedience to one's own belief in the morally obligatory was egoistic. In 1918, he wrote to Andrews: "But we must keep in mind that love of persons and love of ideas can both be terribly egoistic, and therefore, may lead to bondage instead of setting us free" (Tagore 2012f, p. 242). In this view egoism in ideas was a compelling source of deception, for it not only rejected the possibilities of rational introspection of one's beliefs but also denied the possibility that in the world outside (which was independent of one's self and one's ideas) there could be others with equally compelling beliefs different from one's own. All these beliefs (or any of them) might well be true of the world as it was. All or any of them might lead to equally authentic/fruitful individual lives. In other words, the demand for unquestioned obedience shut out both the possibility that one's beliefs might be ethically misguided/mistaken or simply not the only one's capable of making it possible for human beings to lead a truthful and good human life.

What seemed worse to Tagore was that the ego-driven demand for obedience to one's ethical convictions when demanded *of others* could lead to moral tyranny. He argued that moral tyranny was as obstructive of individual freedom as the tyranny of a political tyrant. In fact the latter only compelled external obedience while the former intruded upon an individual's freedom in the mind and spirit. Tagore wrote to Andrews of such tyranny:

> Only a moral tyrant can think that he has the dreadful power to make his thoughts prevail by means of subjection. It is absurd to imagine that you must create slaves in order to make your ideas free. I would rather see them perish than leave them in charge of slaves to be nourished. There are men who make idols of their ideas, and sacrifice humanity before their altars (Tagore 2012f, p. 227).

A related argument about obedience and untruth was that uncritical obedience by oneself to one's own beliefs, and more so by others, had to be sustained by emotion as there was no role for individual reason. Notice that if an individual is to practise celibacy and subdue her physical passion, quite another sort of passion must animate her. In his essays, plays and novels Tagore showed that the nature of passion was to exaggerate an emotion. In Tagore's view exaggeration had a tendency to break the harmony essential to an authentic life, therefore, it was out of place in the human soul. To Tagore (the artist) any incongruity whether of metre in poetry or of passion in emotion was, "like … a woman dressed in tights in the midst of others dressed in simple saris" (Tagore 2012f, p. 238), aesthetically and perhaps ethically ugly. Yet, the problem was not merely that passion broke harmony in the soul. For Tagore, passion led an individual to untruth. Passion was a distortion of a select emotion at the cost of all else. It generated a form of blindness to everything else and all others: "For passion is darkness. It exaggerates isolated facts and makes our minds stumble against them at every step" (2012f, p. 325). Passion would lead an individual into intellectual blindness as a form of untruth; and moral blindness as a source of injustice.

Tagore was not only concerned with the loss of freedom in the imposition of moral rules on others. He was also concerned with the possibilities of deceiving oneself in seeking to obey orders and be compelled. He explored the myriad ways an individual could deceive herself in seeking to obey moral convictions, a *guru/* teacher and even God blindly and out of passion. Bringing out as he put it the "inner drama" in "the human soul" (Tagore 2012f, p. 215), in *The King of the Dark Chamber* he used the Queen Sudarshana as a metaphor for the inauthentic desires in human nature. Sudarshana sought the truth in "the pleasure garden" (Tagore 2012a, p. 429). Having failed to find truth in pleasure as her desires deceived her in their objects she sought truth in the comfort of blind obedience. In the play Sudarshana declared to the king of the dark chamber (a metaphor for the ultimate truth of the universe/Divinity): "Tell me aloud, compel me with the voice of thunder, and compel me with words that will drown everything else in my ears" (Tagore 2012a, p. 410). Speaking through the king, Tagore indicated that an authentic life can only be lived if an individual owns up to her individual freedom. "No one will stand in your way. You can go as free as the broken storm…" (2012a, p. 410).

4.2.3 Gandhian Asceticism: A Denial of Ordinary Life

Another set of arguments about the possibilities of untruth in Gandhi's notion of self-rule/*swaraj* came from Tagore's understanding that self-deceptions need not only be caused by the preponderance of the physical body on egoistic self-concern. Gandhi was powerfully interested in the discipline of the body as the seat of the sense of an individual ego. As brought out in the second chapter in this book, Gandhi was influenced by the classical Yoga school of Indian philosophy. The tradition of the Sāṅkhya Yoga had stressed that the body is distinguishable from the conscious self. According to Sāṅkhya, it is the realization of the self (*puruṣa*) that it is "distinct" from *prakṛti/*nature which marks the liberation of the self. It was in the light of Sāṅkhya Yoga that Gandhi thought the relation between matter and spirit in his moral and political thought. Gandhi represented the body as an object—due to the lack of consciousness in it. Since the individual body was perishable Gandhi thought of it as contingent reality. In fact it was the West's appropriation of the body-as-self that Gandhi criticized as the effect of materialism. Therefore, Gandhi emphasized that the *satyagrahi* had to cultivate spiritual strength by the practice of Patañjali's *yama niyama* such as celibacy, truth, non-violence, non-possession, contentment and fearlessness. The practice of such vows could only originate from the *ātman*, or higher moral sensibilities of man *qua* man. Such a Gandhian understanding of the body as the object for the practice of austerity implicitly expressed the fallible/mortal nature of the body or of the materialism of the West. The understanding that the self and the body are not the same and that the self has to realize that it is "distinct" from the material body is reminiscent of *kaivalyam* (or the right knowledge in Sāṅkhya) as the means of "liberation" for the self (*puruṣa*).

The realization of its distinction from the body is what guided the Gandhian self to realize that the only "thing" that could be "sacrificed" in the course of the political battle is what was contingent and mortal and had been falsely appropriated as the self, i.e. the body.

For Tagore, such an ascetic denial of the physical body could become a self-deception of another order. One may in this context note (for instance) the moral difficulties with an obsessive preoccupation with one's sense of moral self-mastery. Tagore argued that an inflated sense of self might dominate individual efforts at ascetic self-denial. In addition, Tagore also seemed to have had a slightly different argument about the possibilities of untruth in Gandhian asceticism. It was important for Tagore to think about the manner in which an individual ought to accept the world and the many possibilities of experiences which it offered to a human life: "The question is, in what manner do we accept the world which is a perfect gift of joy? Have we been able to receive it in our hearts…?" (Tagore 2012d, p. 143). Tagore believed that receiving the world involved an engagement with all experiences in an environment of completeness. In his view human beings were bound to the world around them "with numberless threads, which extend from this earth to the stars. Man foolishly tries to prove his superiority by imagining his radical separateness from what he calls his physical world … it becomes difficult for man to establish this separateness…" (2012d, pp. 146–147). Therefore, taking a delight in one's physical and spiritual being were both important to receive the world with grace.

This argument was based upon Tagore's alternative understanding of human nature. "…I do not believe in the physical body to be the highest truth in man. But I still less believe in the destruction of the physical body…. What is needed is establishment of harmony between the physical and spiritual nature of man…" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 59). Such an understanding formed the background for, and inspired, Tagore's criticism of the political asceticism expressed in the non-cooperation movement, the boycott of foreign cloth and of educational institutions. Gandhi had argued that individual/collective asceticism was a means to individual "self" mastery and thereby to truth. For Tagore, Gandhian asceticism would lead the individual towards untruth as it rejected an important aspect of ordinary life, i.e. the physical aspect of individual existence. In terms of Tagore's understanding of human nature, to deny the physical was as much a deception as to exaggerate its importance.

Tagore argued consistently in support of the supremacy of ordinary life. For instance, in the debate with Gandhi, he often drew on the contrast between the notion of *Brahma vidya/mukti* as positive and life affirming and nirvana as negative. For Tagore any form of asceticism was a mere instance of *dukha* (misery), which was opposed to the aspirations of the properly human life which constituted *ananda* (joy). "Therefore, the idea of life's training was different in the Vedic period from that of the Budhistic. In the former it was the purification of life's joy, in the latter it was the eradication of it" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 57). On this view asceticism seemed to be, at its worst, a form of violence against the demands of normal life. Tagore wrote to Andrews in 1921 that:

> The idea of non-cooperation is political asceticism…. It has at its back a fierce joy of annihilation which at best is asceticism, and at its worst it is that orgy of frightfulness in which the human nature, losing faith in the basic reality of normal life, finds a disinterested delight in an unmeaning devastation…. No, in its passive moral form is asceticism and in its active moral form is violence … they both are against life (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, pp. 57–58).

It can be philosophically useful to see the divergence between Gandhi and Tagore in the context of their very different locations vis-à-vis modern self-consciousness. Charles Taylor, while speaking of modern moral sensibility speaks of three axes of moral thinking: our sense of respect for others, our understanding of what makes a good human life and the range of notions connected to the sense of dignity. He argues that autonomy has a central place in the modern Western understanding of respect for individuals. That understanding is connected to two more features: the affirmation of ordinary life and the importance we now put on avoiding suffering (Taylor 1989, p. 12). Taylor believes "… that this affirmation of ordinary life … has become one of the most powerful ideas in modern civilization" (1989, p. 14). This connects with the modern idea of what it is to live a full life as also with the idea that there is a certain worth and dignity in this life: "… the key point is that the higher is to be found not outside of but as a manner of living ordinary life" (1989, p. 23). In this respect, Tagore was somewhat influenced by the claims of modern Western moral sensibilities. He seemed (unlike Gandhi) in this respect at least to share in modern self-consciousness. This point gives philosophical support to the argument at the start of this chapter that made an attempt to link Tagore's idea of freedom to Kant's notion of the Enlightenment as freedom in the public use of individual reason. Tagore's relationship to Western modernity and its central figures like Kant is, therefore, significantly at variance with Gandhi's relationship to Western civilization and modernity. This deeply influenced the nature of the disagreement between them.

4.2.4 Martyrdom and Fasting: The Individual's Exultation in "Self"-Effacement

Attempting the discipline of the human body by the practice of Patañjali's *yama* and *niyama* can be effective in combating excess and thereby bringing harmony between an individual's body and mind. However, Tagore argued that when the regulation of food takes the form of fasting as atonement of sin (of self or of "others" for whom one takes responsibility) it takes on the form of a "sublime penance" (Bhattacharya 2008, p. 134). Penance is associated with imposing pain on the self to discipline the body and mind in order to atone for sin. It breaks the harmony of the body and mind but for a temporary period of time. Tagore only voiced his criticism of Gandhi's fasting as a form of penance after Gandhi fasted in close and repeated succession. Tagore argued that a repeated self-infliction of pain transformed the character of penance from an act of reclaiming individual moral

responsibility for the actions of the self, or the collective of which one was a part, to self-mortification. Self-mortification had strong tendencies to lead the individual self into an egoistic and obsessive preoccupation with its own powers of endurance as a source of moral greatness. The notion of *swarajya*/self-mastery lent a false glory to asceticism and self-mortification which could imprison the self in her own inwardness. Tagore felt that an authentic human life was one in which the individual needed to free herself from "the confinement of the life of the self" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 170). Gandhi's fasts, however, tended to encourage a fanaticism which took pride in the glorification of the supremely sacrificing self for what was seen as a worthy cause. In Tagore's view, this could be a dangerously egoistic exercise.

Tagore saw individual human life as an opportunity full of endless possibilities. He argued that Gandhi's technique of fasting as "expiation for the sins" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 142) of his countrymen was "to court death". This meant to "refuse the great gift of life with all its opportunities" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 141). Such courting, almost romancing, of complete annihilation of the supremely sacrificing self was a form of "self-mortification" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 143). Tagore argued that the self who sought glorification in the life of a martyr could not consistently recommend that martyrdom be "universally accepted" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 142). That all should become martyrs. For one thing, if the example of the martyr was indeed imitated it would lead to the extermination of all noble souls from the world leaving the morally feeble to fend for themselves. Secondly, the point of being a martyr was to be exceptional and to stand alone. In terms of Tagore's argument, Gandhi in the person of the martyr wanted to make an exception of himself. His actions being public and yet not recommended to others were meant to show that he alone was fit for the "individual endeavour and for others it has no meaning" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 142). For Tagore, such a public effort to annihilate oneself and thereby make a glorious example of one's life could in itself be a most misguided form of self-love. Therefore, in 1933 he urged Gandhi "to desist from any act that you think is good only for you and not for the rest of humanity" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 143).

Further, since the nature of the self-mortification involved in Gandhi's fasts was "an extreme form of sacrifice", which was "of a passive character" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 142), it could encourage lesser men towards a terrible form of self-deception—to become a hero by destroying oneself. To give up one's life for a cause about which it was (after all) always possible that one might be terribly mistaken. Tagore cautioned Gandhi that in the hands of "lesser men" such fasting would open "up an easy and futile path of duty by urging them to take a plunge into a dark abyss of self-mortification" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 143).

On a historical aside, it is significant to note that Tagore articulated these arguments against fasting in letters and telegrams (written in private) to Gandhi. In a public editorial in the *Harijan* he asked the country to support Gandhi's fast by constructive efforts to further the Gandhian programme. Perhaps this was a testimony to their abiding friendship.

4.3 Tagore: Misunderstanding the Possibilities of Untruth in Gandhi's Methods

It can be argued that Tagore misunderstood the possibilities of untruth in Gandhi's self-assurance about moral rules and codes of conduct. These were recurrent themes in his debate with Gandhi in the *Modern Review* and in his letters to C.F. Andrews. Gandhi's insistence on (what Tagore argued was) an unquestioned/blind obedience to *mantras* must be understood against the background of two points about the nature of such obedience. One, that as Gandhi lived a life which was primarily involved in action, his advocacy of moral rules and vows cannot be understood apart from individual moral practice. This means that moral practice rather than moral belief was central to Gandhi's conception of the moral life. Gandhi's emphasis on practice transformed (what appeared to be) an "unquestioning obedience" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 78) to moral rules into an individual's ability to respond to the particularities of moral situations from *within* a good human life. Secondly, Gandhi's commitment to truth was inseparable from the practice of *ahimsa*. These two points (I shall argue) guarded the path to freedom/*swarajya* and truth in Gandhi from degenerating into soulless obedience untruth and loss of freedom.

4.3.1 Moral Practice and Testing One's Moral Beliefs

The first important point about Gandhi's reliance on (what seemed to Tagore) an unquestioning obedience to vows and rules of conduct as a means to truth and self-mastery/*swaraj* was that Gandhi insisted on individual moral practice in the *presence* of others. As he was not an idealist (unlike Tagore), the life of truth in Gandhi was not a self-absorbed life of quiet, unchallenged contemplation. It is possible that in a primarily contemplative life, an individual's moral practice, thought of as obedience to rules, could well become a self-absorbed practice of unreflective obedience. For example, if an individual were to live a life away from conflicting others—say as a scholar or as an ascetic—the living of the good life could become a largely fastidious following of traditional moral rules. However, Gandhi's good human life was to be lived in the presence of (frequently hostile) conflicting "others". Gandhi's understanding of individual moral practice could not be self-absorbed precisely because its chief object was to make moral engagements with others, whether hostile or friendly. Consequently, it appeared that for Gandhi moral practice was meant to express (and more importantly to test) one's belief in moral rules rather than to demonstrate blind obedience to them. Three ideas became central to Gandhi's conception of an individual's moral practice—the form of an individual's voluntary obedience to moral rules as vows, making moral experiments, and the constant presence of the "other".

Gandhi's interpretation of the traditional *yama/niyama* as vows or *vrata*s is surely significant. Gandhi's emphasis on the taking of vows brought in the

centrality of voluntary agency to moral well-being. Though moral rules were conceived as obligatory, the individual's engagements with such rules of conduct by thinking of them as individual vows was essentially free. To take a vow was to undertake to practise what one professed to believe in. At the same time, a vow was a voluntary commitment made by an individual to test both the truth of her moral belief and the sincerity of her commitment to that truth. It is instructive to note that Gandhi reinterpreted the traditional *yama*s, truth and *ahimsa*, in and by his own practice. He used his individual commitment to truth as a vow/*vrata* to progressively develop a realism in moral matters by the dismantling of distortions caused by his own egoistic desires. *Ahimsa* was reinterpreted as much more than non-injury and as an equality of "deference" to all others, whether friendly or hostile to the self (see Skaria 2011). Such reinterpretation signified that the individual moral aspirant was not to blindly obey rules but that traditional moral rules were to be seen as moral starting points. By progressively following them, the aspirant could become comfortable in living a good human life and thereafter she could considerably transform received understandings of moral rules.

The second idea important to Gandhi's understanding of moral practice was that of making experiments. Gandhi's conception of the individual engagement in moral life was built on the idea of making moral "experiments" with the truth. The taking of vows and obedience to moral rules were also in the nature of moral experiments. The idea of making a moral experiment meant that while following rules one was experimenting with what one believed to be true. This implied that there was a constant vigil against making moral mistakes and a related readiness to admit such mistakes. Witness Gandhi's openness to calling off a mass *Satyagraha* when he felt that a particular movement fell short of truth. (This, for example, happened at Chauri Chaura[1] in the year 1922. Gandhi's openness to terminating the *satyagraha* at Chauri Chaura showed that the nature of obligation in Gandhian vows/rules of conduct was not absolute and blind but sensitive to the particularities of context. Again, witness Gandhi's own trials as he tested the strength of his commitment to the vow of *brahmacharya*. The centrality of the idea of moral experiment in Gandhi not only served to guard the individual against an uncritical blind obedience to rules of conduct it also dismantled the possibilities of moral self-assuredness which had disturbed Tagore.

The third point was that in Gandhi's understanding the individual had to become at home in the moral life not in isolation but in the presence of others. Even Gandhi's writing of an autobiography was an attempt to ensure the presence of others as witnesses of his own moral engagements. To follow rules as means to the truth in conflicts with, frequently hostile others, meant that one's commitments to moral beliefs were not unreflective. On the contrary such commitments were constantly interrogated by others, and also by oneself, when confronted by the disbelief of those others. It was an insistence on acting out what one claimed to

[1] On 4 February 1922 a crowd of peasants burnt a police station at Chauri Chaura in Uttar Pradesh, killing 23 policemen. This episode led Gandhi to call off the all-India movement of non-cooperation against the British.

believe, in the presence of others, that inspired the Gandhian construction of *satyagraha* as an *ahimsanat* mode of firmness to the truth. The voluntary acceptance of pain or *tapasya* was closely associated with *satyagraha.* The voluntary self-endurance to pain was conceived as an appropriately non-violent mode of practising an individual adherence to truth while resisting hostile others who denied one's claim to truth. Since pain was to be endured only as a mode of action expressing one's commitment to truth and non-violence it was difficult for Gandhian *tapasya* to degenerate into a self-absorbed endurance to pain for the sake of the glorification of the ego. Hence, it was not (as Tagore thought) a form of "self-mortification" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 143). The presence of both the hostile and the sympathetic others in the action involved in the Gandhian *satyagraha*s prevented the individual life of pursuit of the truth from degenerating into an ego-inspired martyrdom. *Satyagraha* involved the individual with others like herself and others hostile to herself. It was difficult for the *satyagrahi* to have space for the sort of obsessive self-involvement necessary for the life of a self-assured martyr. If the *satyagrahi* saw herself as a morally superior being or a martyr for the cause of truth she would have to see herself as surrounded by martyrs. There was no space for self-deceptive moral smugness because of the constant engagement with others.

Before closing the discussion on Gandhi's emphasis on practice in individual moral life it might be philosophically useful to examine the Gandhian *mantra* of bread labour. It may be recalled that Tagore had been especially critical of the blind obedience involved in Gandhi's insistence that spinning for *swaraj* was morally obligatory for all Indians. Gandhi's conception of bread labour was constituted by the idea that even those who lived somewhat of an isolated self-absorbed life as for example the artist (or of the creator of ideas) ought to perform some labour towards their physical sustenance. Such labour, both expressed and tested, their sense of moral responsibility towards their own physical sustenance as also their solidarity with all others different from or less gifted than themselves. The *charkha* was Gandhi's grand symbol of such labour. Ironically in Gandhi's understanding, the obligatory engagement in physical work prevented an individual's pursuit of truth from degenerating into (as Tagore worried) "… mere verbal forms, descending into self-deception that hides itself behind sacred names" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 50). Gandhi's insistence that all those who claimed to be pursuing truth and freedom must physically engage in some activity like spinning can be seen as a device to prevent the individual's dedication to truth and sense of moral indignation from remaining purely verbal.

4.3.2 **Ahimsa** *as the Only Means to Truth*

I argued at the start of this section that there were two points about the nature of the obedience to moral rules recommended by Gandhi that guarded against the possibilities of untruth in the Gandhian methods. The first was discussed in the last subsection. The second of these points was that the moral rule central to Gandhi's

moral practice was *ahimsa*. Even truth/God as the goal of the individual moral life was less central to the individual's moral practice than *ahimsa* simply because without Gandhian *ahimsa* there could be no truth. Gandhi constructed moral rules and recommended the taking of vows. However, he insisted upon the inseparability of *ahimsa* and truth. Gandhi's conception of *ahimsa* was wider than non-injury. *Ahimsa* involved humility, egolessness and a love of all dissenting others. *Ahimsa* was in the last a concern for the other as an equality of deference to all others friendly or hostile. (Though I have considerably extended that term I owe this insight into an equality of deference as a Gandhian concern to Ajay Skaria (Skaria 2011, p. 206)). Such an understanding of *ahimsa* as the central virtue in Gandhi safeguarded Gandhi's moral practice from degenerating into the soulless obedience of moral rules.

One can of course wonder how and why *ahimsa* worked as a moral safeguard against soulless obedience in Gandhi. This can become clearer by a reconstruction of Gandhian *ahimsa.* Such a reconstruction could suggest that the question of non-violent versus violent engagement arose only in the context of the other and disagreement (and worse, hostility) from that other. Therefore, Gandhian non-violence presupposed the context of threat to oneself and one's individual or collective person/ego by the presence of the hostile other. In such contexts Gandhian non-violence was not to be expressed by indifference or by withdrawal into a life of self-assured contemplation. (Perhaps such a life of self-absorption was suggested by the traditional Indian term *sannyāsa*.) *Ahimsa* was to be expressed, in and by, an equality of deference to all others, whether friendly or hostile to the self. In the Gandhian account, in fact, a human life *qua* human life could only be properly lived when it was lived in a manner that an individual in private and in public gave different "others" their due deference. The constant deference to the truth in the possession of conflicting epistemic peers who challenge one's settled convictions presumes that moral beings have the ability to respond to the particularities of actual situations. Quite clearly, then, their moral life cannot be a matter of safely and blindly following rules.

Gandhi's construction of *satyagraha* as a mode of resistance to hostile epistemic peers and his engagements in debates was part of an *ahimsa* that deferred to the truth that could well lie in the thinking of others different from oneself. These modes of engagement with difference could be reconstructed as parallel efforts at removing distortions caused by individual or collective egoistic concerns which might have dictated the content of particular moral rules and codes of conduct internal to different religious and social systems. Both the *satyagraha*s and the debates demonstrated that Gandhian *ahimsa* was not an exercise in cultivated patience or blind obedience but an exercise in arriving at the truth of one's moral beliefs by a methodology which was progressively free from self-deception.

In his arguments, Tagore missed the manner in which Gandhi devised modes of action which drew out the individual from a self-absorbed life to a life which involved non-violent engagements with others. Witness how Gandhi used his *ashram*s (Phoenix Settlement, The Tolstoy Farm, Sabarmati, Sevagram Ashram) as sites of shared participation of self and others in a life devoted to the search for truth. While a self-absorbed life might lead one to a moral egoism, the life in the presence of others (like and unlike oneself) was a life in which one's principles and

one's commitment to those principles were constantly tested. It can be said that Tagore somewhat missed the role of this constant vigil in Gandhian life and practice. This led him to misjudge the possibilities of untruth in Gandhian methods to reach the truth and become established in *swarajya*.

4.4 Of Collectives: Nation, Caste and *Varna*

There was another strand in Tagore's preoccupation with the possibilities of untruth in Gandhi's understanding of freedom from untruth as *swaraj* or home rule and the movement thereof. This came from his difficulties with the nature of the self-deceptions involved in the coercion of the unique individual into an organized collective union of a people conceived as having the first place in a normative hierarchy of claims on the individual. Such an organized collective could take the form of a nation/national movement. In the context of the non-cooperation movement Tagore wrote that: "The darkness of egoism which will have to be destroyed is the egoism of the People" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 61). On this view the exaggerated sense of the collective separateness of a people had strong possibilities of coercing the unique individual into subservience to group identity and belief. For one, collective chauvinism subsumed the individual and his concerns with his ordinary normal life into a fictitious hyper-"self". The latter assumed an unquestioned place in a normative hierarchy of ends sought by the individual. It followed that under the influence of these ideas the demands of the collective self-tended to perpetuate atrocities/injustice on individuals in the deceptive guise of ideals such as those of freedom/*swaraj*. (One can recall the protagonists of Tagore's novel *Char Adhyaya*.) The nature of these deceptions and the atrocities committed against individual lives in the name of the nation are also recreated by Tagore in the novel *The Home and the World* (Tagore 2012c).

According to this view, the need to exclude all others leads a nation/collective movement to maintain an insider–outsider dynamics. However, at the same time the integrity of the organized collective also creates the internal urgency to silence dissenters for dissenters can pose powerful threats to the collective and its purposes. Tagore seemed to argue that, with its close association to organized power for perpetuation of itself, the organized collective self inevitably creates the *silenced insider*. In terms of this argument, such a silenced insider could be trapped in deceptions/untruth and suffer a loss of her individual freedom. It is in such a context that Tagore's arguments against nation and patriotism are to be located. In this view, the organization of a people (for collective economic/political self-interest) into a nation needed to be sustained by individual sacrifice. Invocation of passion as a resource for the spirit of self-sacrifice, therefore, became important to the survival of the self-interest of the group. Consequently, the ideology of patriotism with its cult of the glorification of self-sacrifice became central to the concept of the nation.

Tagore had difficulties with the instrumental use of individual passions to sustain the idea of the nation. In his view, passion was an exaggeration of a select emotion

which blinded the individual to everything else in her life. One may better appreciate Tagore's arguments if one examines the effect of passion on individual moral life. For instance, one can consider how love for another empties a lover's world of all else. It encircles the two lovers in a privacy which seeks to make them invisible to the world but only succeeds in making the world invisible to them. Tagore saw somewhat related possibilities of collective self-deceptions in the passion associated with the patriotism aroused by the non-cooperation movement.

At one level the argument against organized collectives was articulated by Tagore in his essays against nationalism in 1919 and in his critique of the movement under the leadership of Gandhi. This difficulty with organized collectives was also apparent at another level in Tagore's idea of the religion of man which leant towards simple folk religion rather than formal institutionalized religion with theological structures. This shows that Tagore's relationship to both modernity and tradition was not one of the uncritical acceptance but of rational interrogation. In this context, it is interesting to read *Tasher Desh,* or *The Kingdom of Cards* (1933/2011), which can be reconstructed as a literary critique of caste and *varna*. Though this play is not a formal part of the Gandhi–Tagore debate, it can be seen as providing the background to the differences between them on the notions of *varna.*

This section explores Tagore's arguments against the idea of a nation, patriotism and *varna* and his views on cosmopolitanism in three sub sections.

4.4.1 Nation and Patriotism in The Home and the World

In his set of essays written in 1919, Tagore made several arguments rejecting (what he described as) "western nationalism" (Tagore 1996a, p. 426) as a source of untruth and loss of individual freedom. Tagore also argued against the concept of the Nation and the ideology of patriotism in *The Home and the World*, in the debate with Gandhi, and in *Letters to a Friend* (letters written to Charles Andrews). Tagore's arguments against nationalism centred on the following points:

1. The nation state is a concept foreign to India. It is an artificial construct, for "India has never had a real sense of nationalism" (Tagore 1996c, p. 456). The nation state was a particular form of the political/economic reorganization of a country which had originated in the Western world. A nation was not synonymous with the idea of a country.
2. The idea of the nation abstracts from man's true nature. For, "It is the aspect of a whole people as an organized power" (Tagore 1996c, p. 458).
3. Nations narrow the freedom of individual's because of the necessity for regimented chains of organization.
4. The idea of the nation exaggerates a natural love of country into "patriotism … the magnification of self, on a stupendous scale—magnifying our vulgarity, cruelty, greed; dethroning God, to put up this bloated self in its place" (Tagore

2012f, p. 287). Such exaggeration of an exclusive love of country has moral limitations.
5. The spirit of conquest and conflict rather than social cooperation is at the basis of nationalism.
6. Society is natural to man, conceived as an end in itself, and has no ulterior motive. However, nations are organized around the self-interest of a people for a mechanical purpose.

Tagore argued that the conception of nation leads to an exaggeration of the political and economic interests of a collective self at the expense of all the ends of an individual life. Related to this loss of the individual self and all that mattered to that self, there was also a loss to the different "other". For, in the passionate advocacy of the collective separateness of a people, there was a threat to the possibilities of arriving at the truth between people or establishment of a harmony between countries.

The literary version of Tagore's criticism of the idea of the nation is made in *Ghaire Baire* (*Ghaire:* the home and *Baire:* the outside world). This novel makes a life-like portrayal of the difficulties of negotiating a relationship with the world when one is suddenly pulled out of the comfort of the "home", a metaphor for the traditional communities of pre-modern India. Tagore's heroine Bimala brings out the duality of this narrative when she says:

> In that future I saw my country, a woman like myself, standing expectant. She had been drawn forth from her home corner by the sudden call of some unknown … it matters not even if she runs blindfolded. She is no mother. There is no call to her of children in their hunger, no home … no household work to be done (Tagore 2012c, p. 299).

In this narrative, both the home and the world can be read as physical or as ideational spaces. Tagore recreates the traditional Bengali household with invisible boundaries between the seclusion of the inner rooms where the women live and the outer living room where visitors are received. As Tagore's heroine transits the physical space she also transits ideational space, rejecting ideas of the good coming down from the past to new ideas learnt from the West. The term "home" can be read literally as being about her home or as a metaphor for pre-modern India and its relationship with the world. This novel involves four central characters: Bimala, the wife of the landlord Nikhil; Sandip, his nationalist friend somewhat inauthentically caught up in the Gandhian movements for *swaraj*; Nikhil, the enlightened landlord who freely supports some of the movements in his own capacity but rejects the coercion of dissenting others into the movements; and Nikhil's widowed sister-in-law, the *bara rani*. The novel can be read at two levels.

At one level, the novel is about the individual's negotiation of a relationship between tradition and modernity. Tagore's criticism of the nation state cannot be read in isolation from his interpretation of the relation between tradition and modernity. This is on account of the fact that India's encounter with the nation state was simultaneously an encounter of the traditional communities of pre-modern India with Western modernity. In the novel, Tagore argues that Enlightenment/modernity is not constituted by a complete or unreasonable rejection of one's past/

tradition but lies in the cultivation of a state of mind. This is a state of mind where the individual assumes responsibility by the very freedom of his/her beliefs in both the old and the new. The individual must grow into the ability to think out the reasons for what he/she chooses to believe in and why he/she accepts traditional societal roles. Individual human life if it is to be enlightened/free cannot be a blind following of tradition or a blind rejection of tradition or indeed an unreasoned acceptance of any new idea from the West. In the story, Nikhil tries to educate his wife Bimala into such freedom in the mind. The point Tagore seems to be making is that freedom to reason would not necessarily involve Bimala's rejection of the traditional role as the *chhoto rani* (younger wife) in a *zamindari* household but only a rejection of unreflective ideational confinement in that role. Bimala realizes this and when she is offered freedom by Nikhil she says to herself: "But can freedom—empty freedom be given and taken so easily as all that? It is like setting a fish free in the sky-for how can I move or live outside the atmosphere of loving care which has always sustained me?" (Tagore 2012c, p. 350). For Tagore, true individual freedom implies a progressive ability to think freely/critically about oneself and one's positions in life without being overcome by the past or by the force of the new/of ideas from the West.

At another more fundamental level, this novel is about India and the world. It is about Tagore's difficulties with the ideological assumptions (of political nationalism and patriotic fervour) of Gandhi's national non-cooperation movement for Indian home rule/*swaraj*. In this intensely political novel, Tagore brought out all the possibilities of untruth that he saw in Gandhi's methods in a life-like potrayal. There were certain tendencies of the non-cooperation movement for nationalism that worried Tagore because of their potential to generate untruth:

1. To begin with, Tagore was concerned with the element of coercion involved in the self-assured imposition of the Gandhian *mantras*/principles as assumptions of the non-cooperation movement. Tagore showed how the dissenting insider was silenced by being coerced into the collective following of *mantras* like *swadeshi*, homespun and the boycott of foreign cloth. In this context, Nikhil cautioned Sandip in the story: "To tyrannise for the country is to tyrannise over the country" (Tagore 2012c, p. 316). One obvious problem with Gandhian non-cooperation was the coercive appropriation of the unique individual into the collective movement. Whether that appropriation was made in the name of religious/spiritual freedom of the individual in the other world or in the name of individual political freedom in this world, Tagore argued that there would be an absolute loss of the individual's freedom to think and act on her own.
2. In Tagore's view, there was more than a loss of individual freedom in such a silencing of dissenting insiders; there was also the generation of mass hysteria to carry followers along. With his close association to Gandhi, Tagore saw that the national movement was sustained by the incitement of a passion that blinded even those persons who were not decidedly morally bad/evil. This to my mind was Tagore's central argument against the non-cooperation movement and the idea of a nation as an end that overwhelmed all other individual human ends.

The fact that the movement and its exclusive goal (of nationhood) were sustained by passion and fed by delusions. There were a number of related arguments which Tagore constructed in this context. Firstly, there was the creation of a certain character in Indian political leadership. Those who dealt in the fiction of the organized economic/political collective self became dealers in all kinds of untruths. In the novel, Sandip owned up to his implication in weaving "a net of enchantments at home" (Tagore 2012c, p. 318). He admitted to Nikhil, "Do you not know that in the immense cauldrons, where political developments are simmering, untruths are the main ingredients?" (Tagore 2012c, p. 312). Through the portrayal of the struggle within Sandip and his moments of self-reflection that came in unsustained flashes, Tagore tried to show that: "…those who deal in delusion end by deluding themselves…" (Tagore 2012c, p. 377). Secondly, there were possibilities of the loss of *country* in the name of freedom for the *nation.* India itself was lost in a net of delusions that detracted from the task of reconstruction. In the story, Nikhil cautions Bimala:

> We must tear away the disguise of her who weaves our net of enchantments at home and know her for what she is. We must beware of clothing her in the witchery of our own longings and imaginings, and thus allow her to distract us from our true quest (Tagore 2012c, p. 318).

Thirdly, the fellow countrymen who were to be enlisted as workers in the task of the reconstruction of the country were distracted from the task and destroyed by misplaced passion. Their love of country was exaggerated out of its natural proportions at the cost of all else of worth in their lives. In the portrayal of Bimala, Tagore showed how passion denuded the individual of both the capacity to think and of the moral sensibility to recognize injustice. Bimala had a sense of her own entrapments and yet could not overcome them:

> This demon in the guise of a God, had come with his ruddy torch to call me that day, saying: "I am your country. I am your Sandip. I am more to you than anything else of yours. Bande Mataram!" And with folded hands I had responded…. Whatever else is mine shall be swept away before my love for you. Bande Mataram! (Tagore 2012c, p. 355)

3. Tagore sensed that the assumption that a monolithic nation state was the goal of the movement for *swaraj* introduced an over-centralization of power and control into Indian polity. It is interesting in this context to note that Partha Chatterjee argues that rationality or modernity was not the dominant idea that fractured India (Chatterjee 1986, p. 101). However, the interaction between the modern Indian state and the pre-modern communities in India present a moment of dissent because unlike in the West, where the pre-modern base tamely surrendered to modernity (Raghuramaraju 2006, p. 30) the process of transformation to modernity was far less successful in India. Whereas Western modernity successfully disinherited the pre-modern realities in the West, in India, pre-modern realities prompted Gandhi's dissent towards modernity. At the same time, pre-modern realities prompted Tagore's criticism of the nation state as a political programme. As the idea of the nation had originated in Western

modernity, it had become powerfully associated with Western history and culture. Tagore made the distinction between the idea of the nation and the idea of the country when he wrote to Andrews:

> It is not true that I do not have any special love for my country but when it is in its normal state it does not obstruct normal reality, on the contrary it offers a standpoint and helps me in my natural relationships with others. But when that standpoint itself becomes a barricade, then … there is a great deal of unreality in it… (Tagore, *Letters to a Friend*, 2012f, vol. IV, p. 306).

He argued that India was a country which had "never had a real sense of nationalism" (Tagore 1996c, p. 456). He recommended that a less centralized form of political governance than the modern Western nation state would work better in the highly diverse set of conditions that constituted India. The powerful differences that characterized Indian polity could be integrated together better after the fashion that they had been in India's past. That is, by a form of state that was not created after the style of the Western nation state but was sensitive to the particularities of the local. Nikhil voiced Tagore's concerns about individual moral life in the powerfully centralized nation state when he said: "What a terrible epidemic of sin has been brought into our country from foreign lands…" (Tagore 2012c, pp. 382–383). Tagore rejected the centralization of political authority in favour of authority which made room for more autonomy at local levels. Significantly, the near-fatal wounding of Nikhil (in the novel) showed that the over-centralization of authority in the non-cooperation movement was insensitive to the immense differences between people at the local level.

In this context, Tagore argued that truth between different groups could only be arrived at by a transcendence of collective egoism. He argued that collective/individual freedom could be secured by reinterpreting responsibility in individual rather than collective terms: "Therefore I do not put my faith in any new institution but in the individuals all over the world who think clearly, feel nobly, and act rightly, thus becoming the channels of moral truth" (Tagore 1996d, p. 551).

4.4.2 *Cosmopolitanism in* The Home and the World

Tagore's faith in the unique individual and his rejection of the collective egoism involved in the idea of the nation state has led to the interpretation that Tagore believed in a Kantian type of cosmopolitanism. Rajat Kanta Ray, for instance, argues that:

> Civil society guarantees the identity of each nationality, and intermixes them in an ever wider felt community, until all distinctions merge in the original species of *Homo Sapiens*. When Rabindranath Tagore, Rammohun Roy's intellectual heir, sang of "the sea of humanity on the shores of India"… it is this ideal he held up before the world at large (Ray 2003, p. 38).

This would take my argument from the parallelism between Tagore and Kant on the nature of human freedom (Chap. 5 of this volume) towards a common philosophy of history. Kant (in his essay on universal history in the seventh thesis) addressed the

international dimension of the development of civil society (Kant 1991). He concluded that the progress from the domestic to the international sphere in developing constitutional political elements of civil society is a necessary aim for further politics.

In such a view, Tagore would have advocated stepping out of the confines of the home to find a sense of belonging (quite literally) in the world. Interestingly (and more recently), Tagore has become the absent interlocutor in the contemporary debate between Martha Nussbaum and her critics. This is a debate about Nussbaum's rejection of patriotism in favour of cosmopolitanism. In this subsection, I examine Tagore's rejection of the idea of nation and his criticism of the national movement (under the leadership of Gandhi) in the context of Nussbaum's enlistment of Tagore on the side of cosmopolitanism. The point here is not to examine the merits of Nussbaum's arguments against patriotism and in favour of a cosmopolitanism derived in a direct lineage from the stoics and the idea of universal reason in Kant. The point is that while her conclusion derived largely from the reading of *The Home and the World* (to the exclusion of all else written by Tagore) that Tagore rejects "nationalism and ethnocentricism" (Nussbaum 2002, p. 5) is certainly justified, the idea that Tagore embraces a cosmopolitanism derived from ideas of universal reason, is philosophically misguided. Interestingly, philosophers familiar with Tagore's music, stories and plays have expressed difficulties with Nussbaum's arguments about Tagore's acceptance of a cosmopolitanism derived from Kant. Writing in the same volume as Nussbaum, Amartya Sen attempts to reconcile Tagore's cosmopolitanism with the fact that he accorded value to tradition and culture. Sen constructs a minimal understanding of cosmopolitanism as a sense of "not excluding any person from ethical concern" (Sen 2002, p. 115). Such an understanding (fashioned perhaps after Tagore) enables him to argue that there is no conflict between the value which Putnam accords to tradition (Putnam 2002, p. 91) and Nussbaum's cosmopolitanism. As indeed there is no conflict in accepting both that Tagore valued tradition and that he left no person out of the sphere of ethical concern. Saranindranath Tagore suggests that Tagore's cosmopolitanism came from a "hermeneutic deployment of reason" (Tagore 2008, p. 1081) as enabling conversation between traditions, rather than from a sense of universal reason.

Nussbaum makes three related points in her essay. Firstly, that patriotism is "morally dangerous" (Nussbaum 2002, p. 4) and that nationalist sentiments ultimately subvert "even the values that hold a nation together" (Nussbaum 2002, p. 5). Secondly, that a more international basis for political emotion and concern can be found in "the cosmopolitan, the person whose allegiance is to the worldwide community of human beings" (Nussbaum 2002, p. 4). Thirdly, she argues that Tagore recommends a primary allegiance to the world community. Tagore "sees deeply when he observes that, at bottom, nationalism and ethnocentric particularism are … akin" (Nussbaum 2002, p. 5). Consequently,

> Once someone has said, I am an Indian first, a citizen of the world second, once he or she has made that morally questionable move of self-definition by a morally irrelevant characteristic, then what, indeed, will stop that person from saying, as Tagore's characters so quickly learn to say, I am a Hindu first, and an Indian second, or I am an upper-caste landlord first, and a Hindu second? Only the cosmopolitan stance of the landlord Nikhil—

> so boringly flat in the eyes of his wife Bimala and his passionate nationalist friend Sandip—has the promise of transcending these divisions, because only this stance asks us to give our first allegiance to what is morally good—and that which, being good, I can commend to all human beings (Nussbaum 2002, p. 5).

Tagore certainly rejected nationalism and patriotism and more decisively than Nussbaum's references to him suggest. For instance in a letter to Andrews, he declared "…I am *not* a patriot" (Tagore 2012f, p. 308). However, this was on account of what, he saw, as the national movement's unreflective acceptance of Western categories to reorganize collective Indian life. Significantly, Tagore rejected the exaggeration implicit in the idea of the nation as the end to overwhelm all other individual human ends. These reasons led him to reject the Western nation state but not the particularity of belonging to a unique culture and country. Nussbaum's philosophical appropriation of Tagore to a form of Kantian cosmopolitanism seems problematic. Nussbaum takes it to imply that since Tagore rejected the idea of nation, any self-definition in terms of being an Indian or even a Bengali appeared to be morally irrelevant to him. What Nussbaum fails to note is that Tagore equally emphatically rejected the idea of a cosmopolitanism based on the idea of an individual's primary allegiance to the world community and consequent denial of the individuality of culture and tradition: "Neither the colourless vagueness of cosmopolitanism, nor the fierce self-idolatry of nation-worship, is the goal of human history" (Tagore 2012e, p. 32). For Tagore, it was man's *dharma*, or essential quality, to exercise freedom in his/her individual mind and spirit. Consequently, Tagore emphasized the sense of individual separateness even in his metaphysical conception of the Absolute:

> As by the limits of law nature is separated from God, so it is the limits of its egoism that separates the self from him. He has willingly set limits to his will, and has given us mastery over the little world of our own…. The reason of it is that the will, which is love's will and, therefore free, can have its joy only in a union with another free will (Tagore, "Sādhanā" in 2012e, p. 129–130).

The clue to understanding Tagore's difficulties with the non-cooperation movement and the single-minded pursuit of political nationalism does not lie in interpreting him as recommending a primary allegiance to the world community in place of ties to home and country. Surely if that was what he meant to say the dilemmas in *The Home and the World* would have been more simplistic than they in fact were. In the manner of Nussbaum's cosmopolitan philosophers, Bimala would have rejected the dictates that universal reason could not endorse. On growing into a freedom to reason, she would have set aside the coercive ties of a relationship with the home for a freely chosen relationship with Sandip. However, Bimala's freedom to think took her towards a freedom in felt ties with her home and some understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of Sandip the nationalist. In arguing against political nationalism, Tagore was arguing against the over centralized institutionalization of a collective egoism of a people. He was not thereby dismantling the uniqueness of people and the value of differences between people.

It is important to note that Tagore had argued that a central difficulty with the nation as a form of political reorganization was that it impoverished the individual's sense of the good and thereby collective moral life. Tagore argued that with its close association to power "the Nation of the west" (Tagore 1996a, p. 420) transformed collective life into a mechanical rather than a social organization. A person who became a part of such an abstraction found it continuously easy to delegate both her responsibility to exercise her freedom to reason and her individual moral responsibility, to the abstraction called nation with its rule of law. However, the abdication of individual moral responsibility to the "iron chains of organization" (Tagore 1996a, p. 417) that constituted the rule of law, impoverished the individual's sense of the good and thereby his/her moral being. In Tagore's view, an individual moral life was authentic only if it emerged from the individual's freedom to respond to reasons. However, the freedom to think did not mean that the intimacy of particular ways of being could not provide the individual with *reasons to act in freely chosen ways*. For Tagore, it was the sense of obligation in human relationships, in the family and the particularities of tradition and culture, that kept individual moral responsibility in place. In this view, a good human life was constituted both by the idea of the right that came from man's individual freedom to reason and by the idea of the good that came from his/her free participation in the social life of his/her community and his/her tradition. Tagore applauded the modern West for its emphasis on universal justice and the rule of law, but he also noted that the moral life of the man living in the modern nation state had become rootless for want of the intimacy of particular ways of living that came down from the pre-modern communities.

In addition, Tagore understood that the idea of nation could only be sustained by individual/collective passion. Therefore, patriotism was the inevitable form assumed by the individual's commitment to the nation. However, patriotism was parochial and as a form of marginalizing the "other" it developed into a passionate single-mindedness that generated a moral insensibility which dulled an individual's sense of the good. This could lead the individual to acts of cruelty against his/her own people as much as against the conflicting outsider.

One might be better able to philosophically reconstruct Tagore's arguments if one examines Hilary Putnam's argument against Nussbaum's in the same volume (Putnam 2002, p. 91). Putnam argues that the

> …besetting problem with philosophical discussions for and against the idea of universal reason is that moral philosophers tend to be partisans either of "the good" (by which I mean to gesture vaguely at the whole area of "the good life") or of "the right" (by which I mean to gesture equally vaguely at the whole area of "justice"). Even when they acknowledge that neither sphere-neither the sphere of the good life nor the sphere of justice (or "duty" or "obligation" etc.) can actually be *reduced* to the other, they often tend to regard the less favoured sphere as subjective…. But … both spheres are essential to our moral lives, and neither is simply subjective… (Putnam 2002, p. 93).

Putnam explains that while maxims concerning justice are often universal, "there is no such thing as a universal conception of 'the good life'" (Putnam 2002, p. 94), firstly, because there can be more than one form of the life that is good. Secondly,

and more importantly, "because good lives do not just spring from rational insights in the way that the area of a circle" might.

> Like forms of painting or music or literature, ways of life require centuries of experimentation and innovation to develop. But in the absence of such concrete ways of life … the universal maxims of justice are virtually empty…. Tradition without reason is blind; reason without tradition is empty (Putnam 2002, p. 94).

Strangely enough, Tagore can be understood in terms that are philosophically closer to Putnam rather than Nussbaum. Tagore argued against the Western concepts of nation and patriotism precisely on account of the fact that the political reorganization of a people for (what was projected as) collective self-interest tended to override, and thereby eventually dismantle, the pre-modern local Indian communities as unique ways of living the good human life. With the dismantling of particular forms of the good human life, the moral life of the individual suffered an irreparable loss. In this view, in a life impoverished of the sense of the good, there could be no sense of the right or justice. Accordingly, Nussbaum's conclusion (in her piece on cosmopolitanism) about the pair of "cosmopolitan" philosophers who demonstrated their reliance on universal reason by copulating in public "because universal reason did not dictate the ways of life" they were "deliberately flouting" (Putnam 2002, p. 95) would be completely unacceptable to Tagore.

Nussbaum argues that *The Home and the World* is Tagore's literary version of a philosophical argument in favour of cosmopolitanism. However, it is surely significant that the story is told through the mouth of Bimala and tells of a loss of her relationship with the outer world with the progressive loss of her home. As she grows close to Sandip's patriotic fervour and feels a passion that distances her from her traditional role in the Bengali household of her husband, Bimala loses her sense of the good human life. When she steals from her husband's safe for the sake of the passion invoked by Sandip in the name of the nation, Bimala loses her sense of right as much as she had lost her sense of the good. She articulates her loss to herself:

> I had robbed my house, I had robbed my country. For this sin my house had ceased to be mine, my country also was estranged from me. Had I died begging for my country, however unsuccessfully, that would have been worship, acceptable to the god's—but theft, is never worship,… (Tagore 2012c, p. 358).

As the novel ends, she finally realizes (with the reader) that in living her life in her own way and own home she had been closer to a good human life. It was in being overcome by the outside world, in an unreasoned passion for Sandip and the national movement, that she blindly stumbled into a morally inauthentic life. However, in the very blindness/irrationality of her passion, she had been strategically manipulated by Sandip and had run the risk of losing her home. With the near-fatal shooting of Nikhil at the end of the story, Tagore showed that there would be an individual cost to pay for the passion generated in the name of nation and patriotism.

Tagore was not only well-rooted in the Indian tradition, but his music, plays and stories were rich in insights of what it meant to live a good human life from within a

cultural set of circumstances rooted in Bengal. Tagore could not be properly described as a cosmopolitan (in Nussbaum's understanding of that term). He accorded a priority to an individual's freedom to respond to independent reason. He thought of real or apparent reasons without any prior commitment to a conception of rationality and universal reason. The Kantian idea of a world republic with its giant chains of organization and policies would be abhorrent to Tagore's respect for unique individuality. His sense of ethical concern for every different other emerged from a rejection of selfishness and appreciation of the possibilities of the realization of harmony between essentially different people and ways of being. However, the appreciation of harmony did not mean that Tagore rejected the value of differences between people and unique understandings of the good life. The choice between the value of differences between individuals and a respect for humanity did not seem an either-or sort of choice in Tagore. He was equally opposed to the blindness in tradition (following *varna*) as to the blind adoption of Western ideas (nationalism). For him, the coercion involved in both meant that individual Indians had lost their freedom to respond to reasons. In so doing, they had also mislaid the plural and syncretic strands in their own tradition. Championing the individual's freedom in the mind as the only means to truth, Tagore rejected a textual reading of the Indian tradition but he also rejected an intellectual Eurocentrism which read human history in universal and statist terms. He argued that: "True modernism is freedom of mind, not slavery of taste. It is independence of thought and action, not tutelage under European school-masters" (Tagore 1996b, p. 446). Tagore believed in the value of the uniqueness of each individual culture and person. Consequently, it is difficult to accept Nussbaum's conclusion that being an Indian or a Bengali was a morally irrelevant attribute for Tagore and that in his view man was better defined as a world citizen. Nikhil, the hero of *The Home and the World*, was a Brahmin Hindu landlord. He was both comfortable with his identity and yet not limited by it. This then is the problem with Nussbaum's reading of Tagore's characterization of Nikhil as a colourless cosmopolitan declaring his first allegiance to universal reason.

4.4.3 *Loss of Individual Freedom: Life in* The Kingdom of Cards

It was not only the coercion involved in the collective Indian adoption of ideas learnt from the West that bothered Tagore. He was equally concerned with the coercion involved in the appropriation of the individual's freedom to think by organized religion and tradition. In 1933, Tagore wrote a play called *Tasher Desh*/*The Kingdom of Cards* (Tagore 1933/2011). It told the story of a restless prince who crossed the seas with a merchant to (as he put it) fill his "…ships with priceless merchandise" so that his "pauper soul" would "return a king!" (Tagore 1933/2011, p. 434). The prince and the merchant found themselves in a "new found land"—the land of the dynasty of cards where it was believed that four different groups were created from the legendary

deity "*Brahma*". The cards were defined by the reiteration of their national anthem: "Blindly following the one in front constrained by age-old traditions. Neither veering nor altering nor opting for change!" (1933/2011, p. 443).

This play was not a formal part of the exchange of letters between Gandhi and Tagore. Neither did *varna* form an overt issue in the debate between them. Yet, Tagore wrote this play to express his difficulties with Hindu orthodoxy and the obligation to accept the idea of *varna.* The differences between Tagore and Gandhi on *varna* (though not a part of the debate between them) formed the historical background to Tagore's play. In 1927, Tagore had written an essay in *Modern Review* called "The *Shudra* Habit". In this essay, Tagore had argued that there were practical and moral effects of following *varna.* He saw in *varna* the danger of collective self-deception leading to untruth/self-deception/loss of freedom and thereby the creation of silenced insiders. He argued that

> The *dharma* of the *shudra* is the only one that is as a matter of fact extant today in this land of India, a state of things complacently accepted by the orthodox believers in the perpetuation of the *dharma* of caste…. Where else, indeed, in all the world can be found the likes of those whose very *dharma* has reduced them to hereditary slaves? (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 12)

In a completely different vein in 1928, Gandhi reiterated his position in support on *varna* in *Young India*. He wrote that *varnashramadharma* defined as "predetermination of the choice of man's profession" (Gandhi, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 11), according to his ancestor's occupation, was economically efficient and reduced competitiveness and conflict. It was also in the spirit of tradition. Gandhi argued that "…*Varna* is the best form of insurance for happiness and for religious pursuit…. I derive it from the Bhagavad Gita…." He maintained that "*varna* had nothing to do with caste" (Gandhi, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 11).

The point of conflict between Tagore and Gandhi on *varna* can be seen to be the same as that with which I started the argument of this chapter, namely, the possibilities of the intrusion of self-deception in the very moral purity of the means adopted (*dharma*) to overcome untruth. In *Tasher Desh* and in "The *Shudra* Habit", Tagore's argument centres on the absorption in tradition and religion as a means to truth. He points out the frightening possibilities of moral tyranny caused by collective self-deception in organized religion. The play can be read as parallel to Tagore's comments against any subjugation of the individual's freedom of the mind. That is, the play can be read alongside the essays against nationalism and Tagore's criticism of the non-cooperation movement.

Tagore used the play about the land peopled by cards to make some comments about the life he saw in India in the 1930s. To begin with, he argued that this was a regimented and rule-bound life in which an individual was completely restricted to the role defined by his/her *varna*. As Chakka, one of the cards, told the outsiders, "We go by the code; we obey the law" (Tagore 1933/2011, p. 439). Tagore tried to portray what such a life might have looked like to the outsider—the prince—the one who was not part of the collective deception of the community. In a sense, by

doing so he positioned himself as an outsider to the community of the orthodox Hindus or believers in *varna.* Tagore spoke through the prince:

> That should make you realize that none of this is for real. This is all made-up, imposed from above, a shell fabricated by the pundits of this country. What are we here for? We'll shatter the shell. Then, you'll be amazed to see the fresh uninhibited spirit that will emerge resplendent in all its natural splendour (Tagore 1933/2011, p. 435).

Tagore recognized the implication of the orthodoxy in the perpetration of rule-bound life on the collective, both in the guise of the spiritual leaders (e.g. the unthinking Dahala Pundit in the play) and in the guise of the educated elite (Golama, the editor of the *Lamp of Card-Island*).

When the cards or the masses were exposed to new ideas and began to question their rule-bound life, they asked Dahala Pundit about the meaning of mandatory rituals: "What is the meaning of the daily rituals of rising and falling, squatting and lying down that we have been following for ages?" The Pundit's reply brings home Tagore's insight that those who deceive others often become a party to the same illusions: "There is no meaning, there is only law" (Tagore 1933/2011, p. 453). The educated elite in the kingdom of cards, however, make a different argument in support of their rule-bound life. In this play, Golama (the editor) argues that tradition safeguards culture. In this context, it can be argued that Golama was perhaps Tagore's literary recreation of Gandhi. As there had been differences between the views of Tagore and Gandhi on *varna* in preceding years (and Gandhi had been editing *Young India*), this character can be reconstructed as Tagore's literary potrayal of Gandhi. Golama says of himself: "Yes, I am the Editor of the *Lamp of Card-Island*. I am the preserver of culture in this Island of cards". He explains "this 'culture thing'" to the king. "It is neither pleasant nor lucid. But it is the newest innovation. It is the sort of culture that is under threat today" It requires the protection of "mandatory laws" (Tagore 1933/2011, p. 444). There is another reference to the editor when a female card, Haratani, cautions a male, Ruhitan, of breaking laws (and singing what his heart longs to sing): "Mind you, make sure that the editor doesn't overhear. He will then mention you in his columns" (1933/2011, p. 450).

Through the depiction of life in *The Kingdom of Cards*, Tagore seemed to be conveying his concerns about the properly human life. The female cards Iskabani and Dahalani are part of a conversation about how the cards wish to mimic human lives: "Cards wishing to discard their make-up to become humans and humans wishing to become like cards. I have of course made up my mind to ask the Prince for a charm so that I can be transformed into a human being" (Tagore 1933/2011, p. 457). The charm which the Indians got (without asking) from the "foreigners" was the "crazy wind … brought along with them …" (2011, p. 447). The exposure to new ideas broke the spell of collective self-deception/habitual rule following and (as Chakka put it) the cards "started to question the meaning of it all?" (1933/2011, p. 453). This questioning and the awakening of rational self-interrogation was an important part of what it meant to be human. The drama ends on a note of optimism as another card, Ruhitan, comments on the deceptive character of the rule-bound life in the kingdom of cards:

> My dear, it dawned on me after I woke up this morning that this card life of ours is a hollow dream, which has crumbled to pieces this day. A new life is wafting in the winds towards us, reaching out to us through the words we now speak, through the songs we now hear (Tagore 1933/2011, p. 451).

At the end, there is a song in a chorus of the cards signalling the need to reflect on unquestioned obedience to rules:

> Smash all dams; smash them all! Free the imprisoned spirit…. Let everything tattered and traditional be washed away. We have heard the clarion call of the nameless new…. Let's ram down the bolted gates of an unexplored world (Tagore 1933/2011, p. 462).

This play reinforces the central argument of this chapter that what concerned Tagore in the debate with Gandhi was not so much the content of specific Gandhian moral principles/convictions but the danger of untruth involved in the unquestioned reliance on the truth of such principles, whether accepted as unquestioned *mantras* or as mandatory laws.

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Chapter 5
Understanding *Swaraj*: Tagore and Gandhi

Abstract This chapter discusses Gandhi's conception of *swaraj* as self-rule and home rule. It also analyses Tagore's understanding of individual freedom as the freedom to reason in the context of Kant's understanding of the Enlightenment as being constituted primarily by the individual's freedom in the public use of his/her reason. The chapter concludes with bringing out the central points of difference between their philosophically conflicting understandings of *swaraj.*

Keywords *Swaraj* · Home rule · Self-rule · *Satyagraha* · *Ram Rajya* · Public reason · Original vocation · Slavish mentality

The last four chapters about the debate between Gandhi and Tagore have interpreted the debate as having been primarily about the proper means to arrive at truth, the possibilities of untruth in the methods adopted to arrive at truth, and the meaning of freedom or *swaraj*. Chapter 3 argued that Gandhi and Tagore shared a non-relativist understanding of truth. Chapter 4 reconstructed the possibilities of untruth that Tagore saw in Gandhi's methods and the non-cooperation movement for arriving at truth and thereby attaining freedom/*swarajya*. This chapter examines the differences between their understandings of individual and collective freedom or *swarajya*. This is important because the differences between their conceptions of freedom both symbolized and powerfully influenced the other issues in the debate between them.

Section 5.1 discusses Gandhi's conception of *swaraj* as self-rule and home rule. Section 5.2 examines Tagore's understanding of individual freedom as a freedom to reason in the context of Kant's understanding of the Enlightenment as being constituted primarily by the individual's freedom in the public use of his/her reason. Section 5.3 brings out the central points of difference between their philosophically conflicting understandings of *swaraj.*

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5.1 Gandhi's *Swaraj*

As I argued in the Preface, the debate between Gandhi and Tagore was a debate about the meaning of freedom or *swaraj* for India. It is significant that both Gandhi and Tagore thought that the critical issue confronting colonial Indians was to determine the meaning of *swaraj* rather than establish who were the legitimate Indians. That Tagore and Gandhi both thought of the debate about India independently of the question of determining legitimacy is significant because the term *swaraj* has had a history of associations with the quest for the legitimate self/*swa* of India. It should be recalled that the term was used for the first time in the mid-seventeenth century during Shivaji's attempts to establish a kingdom independent of Mughal authority. At that time, the dominant sense of the term was legitimate Maratha/Hindu rule against Muslim/outsider domination.

Swaraj came into use again in Maharashtra much later in the twentieth century among nationalists like Tilak, Gokhale, and Ranade. It had a history in the Indian National Congress and was used from about 1885 to 1947 in the course of the anti-colonial struggle. It also had a fairly long history in the politics of expatriate Indians living in Europe, America and Canada. Gandhi wrote *Hind Swaraj* in order to emphasize that the central issue for colonial Indians was to clarify the meaning of *swaraj*/freedom. For Gandhi, it was important that Indians recognized that, given India's religious and ethnic pluralism, emphasizing the search for the legitimate self of India would go against the spirit of nationalism. In this context, Gandhi stressed the civic virtues involved in developing a spirit of Indian nationalism:

> India does not cease to be one nation because people belonging to different religions live in it…. In reality there are as many religions as there are individuals, but those who are conscious of the spirit of nationality do not interfere with one another's religion. If they do, they are not fit to be considered a nation (Parel 2009, p. 50).

The immediate historical and intellectual context for *Hind Swaraj* was provided by Gandhi's involvement with the debate among expatriate Indians to establish the legitimate self of India and secure *swaraj* for that self. Gandhi had become acquainted with the Indians living at the India House at Highgate in London between 1904 and 1909. This was during his visits (from South Africa to London) to promote the cause of the South African Indian community among British parliamentarians. Prominent among the expatriate Indians whom Gandhi met at that time was the Indian revolutionary V.D. Savarkar (who later wrote *Hindutva*). Gandhi was well-acquainted with Savarkar's argument which connected the quest for India's freedom with the need to determine who the "legitimate" Indians were. It may be noted that in terms of the arguments of a prominent section of the expatriate Indian revolutionaries (such as Savarkar, Madan Lal Dhingra and Shyamji Krishna Varma), the normative associations of the quest for the lost Indian identity overwhelmed any moral considerations about the selection of the proper means to secure Indian home rule. In this view, the urgency of the need to reclaim India's collective self-identity justified the use of any means to attain political independence, including acts of political terrorism against the colonizing "other". However,

the term *swaraj* continued to be much contested amongst the expatriate Indian community. Tolstoy became an interjector in these debates when (in response to a letter by Das (1884–1958), the editor of *Free Hindustan*) he wrote the famous "Letter to a Hindoo". Tolstoy argued (in this letter) that non-violence was the only legitimate means to *swaraj* for morally upright Indians. Gandhi chanced upon this letter in 1909 (just before he left London) and he wrote the preface and translated this letter into Gujarati during the same week that he wrote *Hind Swaraj*. Perhaps one of the more immediate reasons that prompted Gandhi to write *Hind Swaraj* was that he wanted to respond to the debate about *swaraj* for India. He had certainly become acquainted with some part of the debate during his stay in London in 1909. The title of *Hind Swaraj* explains the primary message that Gandhi intended to convey in this text—the meaning of and means to *swaraj* for Hind (India).

In *Hind Swaraj* and afterwards, Gandhi made several significant arguments explaining the meaning of freedom/*swaraj*. Gandhi's immediate concern seemed to have been that of reinstating the importance of a discussion on the moral implications of the selection of the proper means to freedom from colonial domination. It was in this context that he made the distinction between *home rule* and *self-rule*, normatively grounding the former in the latter. The distinction was significant as the priority given to self-rule (in Gandhi) established an individual Indian's sense of responsibility for the selection of the appropriate means for securing collective Indian freedom. Consequently, Gandhi's distinction between individual and collective freedom played a critical role in ensuring the moral purity of the means that were to be chosen for securing home rule. It can be recalled that Gandhi defined self-rule as moral self-mastery/rule of the self by the self. He argued that political self-determination would be meaningless without an individual commitment to leading a good human life. The first subsection in this chapter discusses this Gandhian distinction. Gandhi had argued that the only means appropriate for Indians to seek freedom for the self and the nation is through non-violence. In this connection Gandhi connected *swaraj* with *satyagraha*. The second sub section will examine that connection. Another important Gandhian insight about *swaraj* as home rule was that, since India was a country of diverse people, free India had to be conceived in democratic terms. Paradoxically, this was the significance of his use of *Ram Rajya* in connection with *swaraj.*

These three Gandhian insights about *swaraj* will be explored in the three sub sections which follow.

5.1.1 Gandhi's Swaraj*: Home Rule and Self-Rule*

It is possible to understand Gandhi's conception of freedom only in the context of his emphasis that truth was the goal/end of individual life. Both Tagore and Gandhi connected freedom with truth. This may seem to suggest that they were philosophically close to traditional Indian conceptions of spiritual freedom/*mokṣa* as the *telos* of human life. However, that each of them thought of freedom and truth in

terms closer to ordinary human concerns becomes apparent when one considers that they debated about truth as the goal of the Indian movement for freedom. In this context they argued that the primary sense of freedom was the individual's freedom/ *swarajya* to pursue truth. It may be recalled that Tagore wrote "The Call of Truth" and Gandhi responded in "The Poet's Anxiety".

Gandhi emphasized that freedom had to be understood in two related senses as home rule and self-rule: "*Swaraj* of a people means the sum total of the *swaraj* (self-rule) of individuals" (Gandhi 2008, p. 11); and "Real Home Rule is self-rule or self-control" (Parel 2009, p. 116). Gandhi's most significant argument about the meaning of freedom for India was that home rule could only be based on individual self-rule/self-restraint:

> The outward freedom that we shall attain will only be in exact proportion to the inner freedom to which we may have grown at any given moment. And if this is the correct view of freedom, our chief energy must be concentrated on achieving reform from within (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, Vol. VI, p. 441).

To understand Gandhi's *swaraj* one must understand what he meant by home rule and by self-rule and why he argued that home rule must be based on individual self-rule. A letter that he wrote to H.S.L. Polak could throw some light on Gandhi's argument. This letter was written on 14 October 1909, which was just a few weeks before Gandhi wrote *Hind Swaraj*. The letter made it clear that the collective Indian demand for political home rule must be normatively grounded on the moral well-being of each Indian. Gandhi argued that Indians should realize: "…that the freedom they want, or they think they want, is not to be obtained by killing people or doing violence, but by setting themselves right, and by becoming and remaining truly Indian" (Parel 2009, p. 130).

It is apparent that Gandhian home rule could only be based upon the moral self-rule of individual Indians. One can interpret what Gandhi meant by Indians *setting themselves right* in terms of his emphasis on individual self-rule as coming closer to truth/matters of fact as the *telos* of the *properly* human life. In this view, an individual could not pursue truth without *ahimsa*. Therefore to follow truth was to act *rightly* i.e., non-violently, towards all. Consequently, the primary sense of freedom as self-rule was the freedom to pursue truth non-violently as the goal of individual life. For Gandhi, this freedom to pursue truth involved both self-knowledge and knowledge of the "other". One can argue that a significant sense of individual freedom (in Gandhi) was freedom from deceptions which could prevent an individual from getting close to *how things really were* in the world. The central argument in *Hind Swaraj* was that political self-governance for India could only be based upon the individual's freedom understood as self-restraint and self-knowledge. For Gandhi, self-restraint was connected to knowledge of the self and the "other" because an egoistic and over assertive sense of the self could become a source of deception and thereby an obstacle to a knowledge of how things really were in truth. Consequently, the primary sense of individual freedom was the freedom from the tyranny of the individual ego and its set of desires and demands. Such freedom meant that the individual was able, to do and think, what she felt was right. On this view individual self-restraint would remove the obstacles that

prevented India from realizing home rule. Gandhi argued that: "It is *swaraj* when we learn to rule ourselves. It is therefore, in the palm of our hands" (Parel 2009, p. 71). Such individual freedom meant "…self-restraint and not freedom from all restraint which 'independence' often means" (Gandhi 2008, p. 7).

There are two points to be considered about the dependence of home rule on Gandhian self-rule. First, why did Gandhi make this point when he did; and secondly, what did he mean by individual self-restraint and why did he connect it with individual freedom? There are a number of reasons which can explain *why* Gandhi argued that home rule could only be based upon the self-rule of individual Indians. The historical context of *Hind Swaraj* makes it fairly apparent why Gandhi should have emphasized this point. As becomes evident from that context Gandhi appeared to have made this connection in response to arguments suggesting that political terrorism was the appropriate means to Indian home rule. The Gandhian intervention in the debate about *swaraj* for India (in itself) ruled out the acceptance of political terrorism as the means to secure home rule. Another Gandhian insight which had bearings on the dependence of home rule on individual self-restraint was his belief in the inseparability of means and end in human life. Gandhi's insistence on the connection between means and end can only be appreciated if one considers that connection in the light of his conception of the end/goal of individual life. Gandhi believed that the *telos* of an individual life was truth or a realism about how things were in the world. He argued that truth could not be reached between conflicting viewpoints by exterminating all opposition. Therefore, non-violence was the only means to the truth. One way of expressing this was to insist that home rule must be normatively grounded upon the moral self-rule/self-restraint of individual Indians. A third reason for this emphatic connection between home rule and self-rule came from Gandhi's conviction that the individual's search for the truth and her practice of the related virtues had necessarily to be based upon the unity of the moral life. This meant that an individual's quest for truth was the opposite of the episodic and fragmentary. Such an understanding led Gandhi to insist on the inseparability of means and end arguing that the goodness/non-violent character of the means adopted to reach an end (such as home rule) was constitutive of the goodness/truth of that end itself. Gandhi brought home this point when he said: "Do you not tremble to think of freeing India by assassination?…. Whom do you suppose to free by assassination? The millions of India do not desire it…. Those who will rise to power by murder will certainly not make the nation happy" (Parel 2009, p. 75).

In this context it is important to determine what exactly Gandhi meant by self-rule as a rule of the self by the self. It is at this point that Gandhi's connection with the Indian philosophical tradition becomes most apparent. It is interesting that Gandhi used the metaphor of the *ātman* (which had dominated classical Indian ethics) to indicate the moral possibility that every individual could develop a form of free personhood which was progressively closer to *sat*/truth. It is clear that by truth Gandhi meant propositional truth, or *how things really were in the world*, the *moral value* involved in truth *telling* and the *Absolute Truth* or God. In other words, Gandhi thought that transparency in what a person thought and did and realism in moral matters were the goals of an individual life. For an individual to be free was,

therefore, in a significant sense, to be free from the deceptions which had obstructed an individual's access to matters of fact. Gandhi connected a preponderance of deceptions primarily to an individual's ego, which constructed a deceptive and inflated sense of the self. Therefore, he spoke of the need for the rule of the egoistic self by an individual's higher moral sensibilities. In this context he argued that following the traditional *yama/niyama* or the ethical discipline recommended by the schools of Indian philosophy was the appropriate discipline to subdue the individual's ego by a control of the self-indulgences related to an individual's body and mind: "We experience every moment of our lives, that often while the body is subject to our control, the mind is not. This physical control should never be relaxed, and in addition we must put forth a constant endeavour to bring the mind under control" (Gandhi, *From Yeravda Mandir* in Narayan 1995, vol. IV, p. 222).

Gandhi often emphasized the need to control an assertive sense of the self in the individual's mind and its ideas. Parel (in his translation of *Hind Swaraj*) notes that: "The Gujarati text reads; 'one's rule over one's own mind is real *swaraj*'. The mind, again, is shown to be the key faculty in Gandhi's ethics" (Parel 2009, p. 116, fn 243).

It is clear that for Gandhi an individual's self-restraint, to be achieved by the practice of the *yama* and *niyama* (specified by traditional Indian ethics), would make for freedom/*swarajya.* Tagore brought out the self-contradictions in this position by his arguments against the compulsion involved in Gandhi's idea of self-rule as self-restraint and the practice of virtues. It may be noted that Gandhi had often argued that the practice of virtues was strengthened by taking vows/*vratas* to practise them. Tagore found Gandhi's emphasis on taking vows absolutely contradictory to individual freedom. However, in support of Gandhi, one can argue that *swaraj* as moral self-restraint was not a stoic practice of taking vows recommended for its own sake. Individual freedom was a freedom (from the preponderance of deceptions) to pursue truth. Since Gandhian home rule was dependent on individual self-rule (and the practice of virtues), such self-rule was recommended as the means to secure collective rights and attain home rule. Consequently, in Gandhi's view the compulsion involved in following the virtues (by taking vows to practise them at all costs) was not an end in itself. Such compulsion would lead the individual to freedom from her egoistic preoccupations, and thereafter it would lead the collective to home rule. In this context, Gandhi had said (quite paradoxically): "I realized that a vow far from closing the door to real freedom opened it" (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol. I, p. 308). The reason Gandhi thought that taking vows to practise virtues would lead an individual to freedom was that taking vows could help the individual to become free of self-indulgences. Consequently, vows could lead an individual progressively towards both self-knowledge and knowledge of the "other". Gandhi made such connections quite clearly: "….even knowledge of the self within presupposes a pure heart, which in its turn depends on the practice of the *yama*s and *niyama*s—the cardinal and casual virtues…" (Gandhi 1947, Vol. 33, pp. 447–448).[1]

[1] Between the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* [*CWMG*] (1955) and the electronic edition (*eCWMG*) are disputed differences of content and different volumes and page numbers.

Since Tagore had been critical of the compulsion involved in Gandhi's conception of self-rule (as an obedience to vows) it is important to re-examine Gandhi's understanding of vows. In this context one can note that Gandhi's insistence on vows involved an emphasis on the individual's *freedom* in making a voluntary decision to follow her moral convictions at all costs. Gandhi had said: "To do at any cost something that one ought to do constitutes a vow" (Gandhi, *From Yeravda Mandir*, in Narayan 1995, vol. IV, p. 249). In this view an individual would freely take vows to tell the truth always, to be non-violent, not to be acquisitive, etc., as exercises to restrain an over assertive sense of her desire driven self. For Gandhi, desires trapped an individual in a life of untruth and seriously compromised his/her freedom .This lead Gandhi to emphasize "…the necessity of vows for the purpose of self-purification and self-realization" (Gandhi, *From Yeravda Mandir*, in Narayan 1995, vol. IV, p. 250). From a Gandhian perspective, voluntarily taking vows to follow virtues led an individual to experience inner freedom from the demands of her "fat relentless ego" (Murdoch 1970, p. 51). In this view, the only way to get closer to truth was to act in an *ahimsanat* or a loving/non-egoistic manner towards all others. While explaining individual freedom in *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi argued that: "To observe morality is to attain mastery over our mind and passions. So doing, we know ourselves" (Parel 2009, p. 65). One may appreciate Gandhi's insistence on individual self-rule in the quest for truth and freedom, if one remembers that so much of wrongdoing comes from the failure to apprehend *how things really are* independently of the ego and its desire driven self-concerns.

This makes it clear that Gandhi was comfortable with an understanding of *swaraj*/individual freedom that was based on a dialogue with collective memory and collective understanding as embodied in the Indian philosophical tradition. However, it is important to note that this was a dialogue and not an unthinking repetition or reiteration. For Gandhi did not think of individual freedom as *mokṣa*, but as the development of a form of non-egoistic personhood in the interest of securing home rule for all Indians.

Gandhi was clearly not talking about individual freedom as a prerequisite for home rule in terms of *mokṣa qua* spiritual freedom. However, (as already noted) his connection between moral self-mastery and individual freedom troubled Tagore (see Chap. 4 in this book). One way in which one can understand this argument could be if one were to reflect on individual freedom. In an important sense one is free to think and act if one is free from domination and interference when one thinks and acts. One of the most active contemporary debates about freedom focuses on the divide between the republican idea of freedom as non-domination and the alternative conception loosely described as the liberal conception of freedom as non-interference (Laborde and Maynor 2008). On the republican view freedom (both of the individual and of the state) should be equated with nothing more or less than non-domination (Petit 2008; Skinner 2008). This issue can be simply put in terms of the question, whether freedom means the absence of the active imposition of one's will by another—that is, interference. Or freedom means the absence of any form of dependency on the will of that other—that is, domination. However, one might seriously consider the possibility that being *deceived* by others or by one's own ego-

driven passions can compromise one's own freedom to think and act. An important sense of being free certainly seems to mean that an individual should not be subjected to interference/domination in freely responding to matters of fact. However, it is important to note that one can freely respond to matters of fact only if one knows what they are and is not deceived about them. For being deceived prevents one from being free to think or act simply because one does not know quite how things are. Consider how free one would be if one lived in a dream world completely ignorant of one's real situation in life. One might be comfortable in being deceived but one would certainly not be free. Therefore, one can appreciate Gandhi's insistence that *coming closer to truth* was *a condition* of individual and collective freedom. Gandhian *swaraj* as self-rule was primarily conceived as a life of coming progressively closer to truth as a condition of individual and thereby of collective freedom.

There were two important elements in Gandhian self-rule which had a direct bearing on the connection between self-rule and home rule. Firstly, Gandhi emphasized that becoming self-ruled by the individual practice of virtue helped an individual to overcome a weakness of will. Weakness of will was understood by Gandhi somewhat in the sense of Aristotle's *acrasia*. Aristotle it may be recalled understood *acrasia* as moral weakness which prevented the individual from doing what she *knew* she ought to do. Gandhi also thought of weakness of will as moral weakness but he had two significant suggestions: one, that such moral weakness could be progressively overcome if an individual strengthened her determination to do the right thing by becoming at home in the practice of virtues. As already noted taking vows to practise virtues could play a significant role in such an effort. Two, he saw a circular relationship between weakness of will/moral weakness and fear for the sake of the self and its many possessions. In Gandhi's view, moral weakness, which led to a failure to do what one knew to be right, was sometimes caused by fear for the sake of oneself, one's possessions and one's family. Giving in to such moral weakness, in turn, progressively increased that fear so that they shared a somewhat circular relationship. To look at these two points is important because Gandhi related moral weakness and fear with the voluntary subjugation of Indians to the will of the colonizer.

In this context, Gandhi argued that an individual's weakness of will/moral weakness was directly related to the loss of her freedom to another. This was because, it was on account of such weakness, that an individual felt unable to do, what she knew to be right, and felt compelled to, passively accept, a loss of her freedom. Gandhi also argued that often people did not do, what they knew they ought to do, out of a fear for the sake of the self and the fear of losing their possessions. According to Gandhi this fear made it possible for another to subjugate, a person or a people, and keep them in a state of bondage: "It is my certain conviction that no one loses his freedom except through his own weakness" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 311); "Immediately the subject ceases to fear the despotic force, his power is gone" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 313).

The practice of Gandhian virtues, i.e., truth, non-violence, non-stealing, non-possession, sexual abstinence, etc., led to a progressive rule of an individual by her higher moral sensibilities. This made it possible for her to get gradually free of an

ego-driven attachment to her own person and her possessions. In this context, one can recall another Gandhian description of a vow: "A vow means unflinching determination, and helps us against temptation. Determination is worth nothing if it bends before discomfort" (Gandhi, *From Yeravda Mandir*, in Narayan 1995, vol. IV, p. 248). Gandhi's recommendation of taking vows to practise virtues was therefore directly related to dismantling the moral weakness of individual Indians. Gandhi's recommendation of moral discipline was also a reflection of his insights into an individual's implication in her own loss of freedom. In this view an individual's attachment to an inflated sense of herself made her weak and fearful for the sake of that self, her inflated self-image and her many wants. This allowed others to dominate her and keep her in a state of subjugation. Therefore, Gandhi insisted that the practice of self-restraint progressively dismantled the individual's inflated attachment to the self and thereby led her to experience a freedom from fear *for the sake of* the self. Such fearlessness was the necessary condition for individual freedom: "Passive resistance cannot proceed a step without fearlessness. Those alone can follow the path of passive resistance who are free from fear; whether as to their possessions, false honour, their relatives, the government, bodily injuries, death" (Parel 2009, p. 96). "We must be content to die if we cannot live as free men and women" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 313). The individual Indian's determination to act rightly, and her freedom from fear, would make it possible for Indians to collectively engage in a non-violent resistance of the colonizer: "*Swaraj* is the abandonment of the fear of death. A nation which allows itself to be influenced by the fear of death cannot attain *swaraj*, and cannot retain it if somehow attained" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 319).

Gandhi believed that non-violent collective resistance to untruth or, domination and active interference, could only be based upon individual self-restraint and fearlessness as the prerequisite for securing political rights for all Indians. It must be kept in mind that individual self-rule was the basis of home rule. Gandhi was interested in political self-determination for Indians and spent his entire life trying to secure home rule: "As every country is fit to eat, to drink and to breathe, even so is every nation fit to manage its own affairs, no matter how badly" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 311).

Having considered Gandhi's account of self-rule it is important to examine the home rule that he hoped to ground on the self-rule of each Indian. Gandhi gave a comprehensive account of home rule and spoke of freedom in terms of the famous square:

> Let there be no mistake about my conception of swaraj. It is complete independence of alien control and complete economic independence. So at one end you have political independence at the other the economic. It has two other ends. One of them is moral and the other social; the corresponding end is *dharma*, i.e., religion in the highest sense of the term. It includes Hinduism, Islam, Christianity etc., but is superior to them all…. Let us call this the square of swaraj, which will be out of shape if any of its angles is untrue (Gandhi 2008, p. 10).

The square emphasized that living under Gandhi's home rule, individual Indians would be *free from* oppression in politics, economics, religion and society. Home

rule as a freedom from oppression was given a concrete shape in terms of Gandhi's emphasis on a set of individual rights. Gandhi clearly understood the importance of political rights to human dignity. This becomes clear when one considers that the Gandhian *satyagrahas* (non-violent resistance)[2] were about securing rights to the politically and economically dispossessed. Gandhi saw fairly early (while in South Africa itself) that rights were an essential part of human dignity and freedom. In a manner, this understanding of the importance of rights, as and when it dawned on him (perhaps after his experience in the train in the Transvaal in South Africa), has been seen as a transformative experience, making for the transition from man to *Mahatma*. In South Africa, Gandhi fought for freedom from racial oppression. Once back in India he led several collective movements for the rights of the economically, politically, and even religiously, dispossessed. One may note in this connection that Gandhi had led temple entry *satyagrahas* to support the rights of the depressed classes to enter Hindu temples. In April 1917, Gandhi led the *satyagraha* at Champaran (in modern Bihar state) to free the tenant farmers from the control of European planters. From that time to April 1919 Gandhi led the first all-India *satyagraha* movement. A country-wide strike was organized to secure withdrawal of the Rowlatt Bills. The Rowlatt Act had been framed to enable some offences to be tried expeditiously before high court judges with no rights of appeal. In August 1917, Gandhi led the Ahmedabad textile workers' movement. The year 1918 marked the Kheda *satyagraha*.[3] In 1928, there was the Bardoli *satyagraha*.[4] The salt *satyagraha* in 1930 was undertaken to remove those laws which caused great hardship to the poor and to break government monopoly over a food necessity. As early as 1931 Gandhi defined *swaraj* as home rule in terms of equal rights for all Indians. The Resolution on Fundamental Rights and Economic Changes was passed in the 1931 session of the Indian National Congress (Gandhi 1947, Vol. 51, p. 327). This resolution was introduced by Gandhi himself and co-drafted by him and Nehru. The preamble to this resolution stated that one of the

[2] Gandhi explains *satyagraha* as an insistence on truth with the force derivable from such an insistence.

[3] In the year 1918 there were semi famine conditions in the Kheda district of Gujarat. The peasants were unable to meet the assessment for that year. They were legally entitled to suspension of tax. However the government refused to grant relief. The kheda *Satyagraha* led to the grant of partial relief and the consciousness of a moral strength was generated in Gujarat peasantry.

[4] In 1927 the revenue department at the Bombay Government enhanced the assessment in Bardoli taluq by 22 %. In some cases it was raised by as much as 60 %. The Bardoli peasants claimed that this rate of enhancement was unjust since it was fixed without full investigation and in addition that the tax department had made an inaccurate report. As the peasants could not pay the raised taxes it was decided (at a conference organized by the congress in Bardoli) to withhold payment of the enhanced portion of the taxes. Sardar Vallabhai Patel who was invited to lead the movement initiated correspondence with the government setting forth the demands of the peasants for an enquiry and also their refusal to pay the enhanced taxes. Bardoli *Satyagraha* took place in 1928 . The *satyagrahi* peasants submitted willingly to the penalties of arrest and attachment of their lands. The government appointed the Broomfield committee thereby granting an impartial enquiry into the enhancement of the tax, the forfeited lands were restored to the peasant and the *satyagrahi* prisoners were released.

chief aims was to "enable the masses to appreciate what swaraj… will mean to them" (Gandhi 1947, Vol. 51, p. 327).

Though Gandhi emphasized that home rule meant equal rights for all Indians, he was clear that individual rights were conditional on the performance of duties:

> I would say that there is nothing like a right. For one who has no duties there are no rights either. In other words, all rights emanate from duties-if there is no duty there is no right either. When I do my duty, it brings some result and that is my right…. (Gandhi 1947, Vol. 97, p. 377).

This emphasis on the individual performance of duty before rights was part of Gandhi's efforts to reinstate the individual Indian's sense of responsibility for the acquisition of individual/collective rights. In this context it is important to note that Gandhi had rejected abstract general responsibility institutionalized through the rule of law and the administration of justice by the law courts. One can recall his arguments against lawyers and law courts in *Hind Swaraj* to substantiate this point. By emphasizing individual self-rule before collective home rule and duties before individual rights, Gandhi stressed his commitment to reinstating individual moral responsibility for collective freedom. A last point to emphasize about Gandhi's understanding of home rule is that Gandhi thought of home rule in plural and democratic terms. This was well expressed by his use of the term '*poorna swaraj*':

> Poorna swaraj…. 'Poorna' complete because it is as much for the prince as for the peas ant… as much for the Hindus as for the Musalmans, as much for Parsis and Christians as for the Jains, Jews and Sikhs, irrespective of any distinction of caste or creed or status in life (Gandhi 1947/2008, p. 9).

The home rule that Gandhi had envisaged was a sovereignty of the people based on the exercise of moral authority by each citizen. This was well brought out by the correlation between individual rights and duties. The significance of Gandhi's use of *Rama Rajya* in connection with home rule will be considered in the third sub section. The other significant point about Gandhi's conception of home rule was the method that Gandhi devised to secure it, i.e., *satyagraha*. The next subsection examines this connection.

5.1.2 Satyagraha *and* Swaraj

A discussion on Gandhian *swaraj* would be incomplete without a consideration of another Gandhian connection: that between *satyagraha* and *swaraj*. Gandhi's understanding of individual/collective freedom was structured by the connection which he made between *swaraj* and *satyagraha*. In itself, this connection is not surprising, given Gandhi's insistence on the inseparability of the means employed and the end sought in an individual life. Gandhi's emphasis on the unity of a good life meant that *swaraj* as collective freedom based upon individual self-rule could be realized only by a practise of virtues with pre-eminence given to *ahimsa*/non-violence. Since collective freedom was normatively grounded on individual

self-rule there could be no home rule without the individual practice of non-violence in the interest of truth. *Swaraj*, therefore, could only be realized and protected by *satyagraha*.

One can unpack this connection by looking more closely at what Gandhi meant by *swaraj* and *satyagraha. Swaraj* was self-rule *qua* home rule and Gandhi's *satyagraha* was a non-violent resistance by the self, in the interest of truth, when she confronted hostile others in conflict situations. Gandhi defined *satyagraha* as follows:

> This is the literal meaning of satyagraha—insistence on truth and force derivable from such insistence…. truth is love and love is truth. We shall find too, on further reflection, that conduct based on truth is impossible without love. Truth force then is love-force. We cannot remedy evil by harbouring ill-will against the evil doer (Murti 1970, p. 22).

> Passive resistance [s*atyagraha*] is a method of securing rights by personal suffering; it is the reverse of resistance by arms (Gandhi, in Parel 2009, p. 88)

In an interesting turn, Gandhi connected *satyagraha* with *swaraj:*

> This satyagraha is India's distinctive weapon. It has had others but satyagraha has been in greater use. It is an unfailing source of strength, and is capable of being used at all times and under all circumstances. It requires no stamp of approval from the congress. He who knows its power cannot but use it. Even as the eye lashes automatically protect the eyes, so does satyagraha, when kindled automatically protect the freedom of the soul (Gandhi 1947, Vol. 14, pp. 64–65; also quoted in Dalton 2004, p. 28).

Since Gandhi thought of *swaraj* as both self-rule and home rule it is important to note that the practice of *satyagraha* protected both an individual's freedom as self-rule and collective freedom as home rule. To begin with, one can reconstruct Gandhi's arguments about the connection between *satyagraha* and individual freedom. An important argument that Gandhi made about individual freedom as self-rule was that it meant a freedom from the demands of the individual's own ego and its projects. Gandhi saw that the pressing demands of the individual's ego entrapped the self in a life of untruth and loss of freedom. This happened because the self was *compelled* to cooperate at all times with the deceptive self-images projected by her ego. In that sense then an individual who gave into the self-centred concerns of an egoistic life *was not free* to pursue truth in what she thought and did. One may understand this better if one recalls that one's own egoistic concerns are powerfully threatened by one's acquisition of knowledge of how things are as a matter of fact. Witness that individual pursuit of the truth about oneself seldom reveals that one is the sort of person one would like to think one is and correlatively that "others" are as one would like to think them to be. If one pursued self-knowledge and knowledge of the other without the interference of one's ego, one might well realise, that one was not as good a person as many "others" one had been in conflict with. In that sense one can say that untruth is an essential part of an individual's self-driven egoistic projects.

The need for Gandhian *satyagraha* arose when one came into conflict with hostile others. It meant that one could not retaliate to hostile others with violence but had to meet the conflicting other with love, understood *as deferring equally* to the person and beliefs of that other as one would to one's own person and beliefs.

This, in itself, meant that an individual had to engage in the pursuit of truth with the faith that the other was an epistemic peer and could be closer to truth than oneself. Gandhi said in this connection: "If you want to see God in the form of Ramarajya, the first requisite is self-introspection. You have to magnify your own faults a thousandfold and shut your eyes to the faults of your neighbours. That is the only way to real progress" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 327). The practice of Gandhian *ahimsa* as a pursuit of truth meant that the individual had to meet his/her opponent with deference. It seems apparent that to defer to someone who (in one's estimation) causes oneself physical/emotional damage certainly involves the dismantling of a self-righteous understanding of oneself. This for Gandhi was true *swarajya* understood as an individual's freedom from ego-driven deceptions, which had a tendency to project her as righteously closer to the truth (and to a just estimate of things) than any conflicting other. Gandhi expressed this insight by emphasizing that the *satyagrahi* enjoyed freedom by virtue of attaining a state of mind which was free of self-concern:

> ….satyagraha is really an attitude of mind. He who has attained the satyagrahic state of mind will remain ever victorious, at all times and under all conditions irrespective of whether it is a government or a people he opposes, whether they be strangers, friend or relatives (Murti 1970, p. 8).

Even the very least progress in *satyagraha* meant that the *satyagrahi* had to put the pursuit of truth above an attachment to his/her own self. The practice of non-violence in the pursuit of truth involved considerable hardship to the mind and body of the individual *satyagrahi*. It, therefore, required (as an essential prerequisite) a certain detachment from egoistic self-concerns. In that sense then engagement in *satyagraha* protected an individual's freedom as self-rule or self-restraint. In this context, it is interesting to recall an argument made by Sorabji which attempts to bring out the connection between detachment and freedom:

> Stoic values overlapped with Gandhi's to some extent. For different reasons, they both sought to practice emotional detachment. Yet, despite the detachment, they both believed in extending *love,* to all humans, and both sought to engage in *politics*. The emotional detachment gave to both a certain kind of *freedom* (Sorabji 2012, p. 2).

Significantly, in Gandhi there is the clear sense that a detachment from the egoistic self and inflated self-concern (which was an essential prerequisite of the individual's practice of *satyagraha*) led the *satyagrahi* to experience an inner freedom.

However, Gandhi had another important argument about the connection between individual *swaraj* and *satyagraha*. He thought that the excessive attachment to the individual self was driven by an egoistic regard for oneself and one's projects as better and more important than any other cause, including, the pursuit of truth or justice. This led an individual to become protective of herself and consequently fearful for the sake of the self. Fear became the chief reason for the individual to become an accomplice in her own loss of freedom. The individual became an accomplice in the interference/tyranny of a person, society or government to protect her own physical and emotional integrity. However, the individual also sometimes

cooperated with another's tyranny to protect possessions, often amassed to satisfy demands for wealth, which helped to sustain her inflated egoistic self-images. One can appreciate the strength of Gandhi's insights if one reflects on the acquisitive culture of modernity. Possessions (and perhaps even persons) are seen in modern cultures as self-enhancing, and thereby as essential to one's self-definition. This can often be taken to absurd extents. For instance, sometimes wearing a dress with a specific label or driving an expensive car can make a person believe that she is now a better (and a more worthwhile) human being than anyone else. This can lead people to voluntarily accept a loss of freedom (lock themselves in, restrict their freedom, accept interference by others who contribute to their material well-being), so that they can protect their possessions. They may then restrict their own movements and, in fact, voluntarily cooperate with the domination of stronger others, for the sake of what they own more than anything else. Gandhi was sensitive to the possibility of an individual's complicity in the loss of her own freedom:

> The power of a king may be unavailing against an individual. But it can touch his property, or play on his fear of losing it. The king bends his subjects to his will by threatening them with loss of property or physical harm. Therefore, under the rule of a tyrannical king, for the most part it is only those who make themselves accomplices in his tyranny that can retain or amass wealth. Since a satyagrahi cannot allow himself to be an accomplice in tyranny, he must, in such circumstances, be content to think himself rich in his poverty (Murti 1970, p. 13).

Gandhi emphasized that an essential prerequisite to employing *satyagraha* as soul force was individual fearlessness. To pursue truth by non-violently resisting the opposing other one had to completely disregard concern for oneself or one's possessions. In this view, *satyagraha* led an individual to experience freedom from fear for her body, possessions and attachments.

> A satyagrahi enjoys a degree of freedom not possible for others, for he becomes a truly fearless person. Once his mind is rid of fear, he will never agree to be another's slave. Having achieved this state of mind, he will never submit to arbitrary action (Murti 1970, p. 7).

In Gandhi's view, *satyagraha* protected home rule as it protected self-rule. One can reconstruct some Gandhian arguments that explained his conviction that *satyagraha* would first secure, and later protect, the collective freedom of the Indian nation. The first is the fairly straightforward argument that India could become initially free from colonial domination only if there were Indians who were ready to suffer hardships and sacrifice their own well-being for public good. Gandhi argued that in "political matters" it is the case that: "For public good men have to suffer hardships even to the point of death" (Murti 1970, p. 5). However, it is important to emphasize that the Gandhian connection between *satyagraha* and *swaraj* was not restricted to the initial achievement of home rule as a freedom from colonial domination. Gandhi thought that *satyagraha* was equally important to protect/retain *swaraj* once political home rule had been secured by Indians. Therefore, a more important argument about the relationship between *satyagraha* and political self-determination relates to Gandhi's understanding of the proper relationship between the individual and the political power, which was vested in the collective. Gandhi

thought that an individual's freedom to pursue truth involved her capacity to regulate the exercise of collective power by an elected government whenever that government was unjust:

> Real *swaraj* will come, not by the acquisition of authority by a few, but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused. In other words, *swaraj* is to be attained by educating the masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 317).

Significantly, for Gandhi home rule meant freedom from oppression for every Indian. Such freedom could only be secured and retained if there were equal political, economic, social and moral, rights for all Indians. However, Gandhi's acquaintance with British constitutionalism led him to the understanding that the rule of law alone could not guarantee real rights to each citizen. In this context Gandhi emphasized that individual Indians were responsible for their capacity to regulate the exercise of collective authority and also to retain their own set of rights. In this context Gandhi made the point that decentralization of political power would help to maintain such an individual sense of political responsibility. He made two significant arguments against the centralization of political power. Firstly, he argued that centralization of political power could make it difficult for individual's to accept responsibility for the actions of the collective of which they had each formed a part. Secondly, Gandhi argued against centralization as being invariably connected with violence. As centralized power could only be properly exercised by centralized institutions such as law courts, the police and armed forces, Gandhi argued: "Centralization as a system is inconsistent with non-violent structure of society…. The centre of power now is in New Delhi, or in Calcutta and Bombay, in the big cities. I would have it distributed among the seven hundred thousand villages of India" (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol. VI, p. 449).

These insights led Gandhi to recommend that political power should be decentralized with village democracies becoming focal units. He constructed an alternative understanding of the governance of India along the lines of "an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual…." (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol. VI, p. 449).

Clearly, there was a more direct way by which every individual at the centre of the "oceanic circle" (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol. VI, p. 449) could secure and retain her freedom from oppression/injustice. This was by understanding that the capacity to regulate (and more importantly control) political authority belonged to her individually. A citizen could exercise a direct control on authority by realizing the connection between *satyagraha*/non-violent resistance and *swaraj*/home rule. A point that is often missed (especially in contemporary Indian politics) is that the connection between *satyagraha* and Gandhi's *swaraj* as home rule was grounded on the connection between *satyagraha* and *swaraj* as self-rule. This meant that only those who were engaged in a life of self-restraint and practice of virtue had the moral right to exercise the capacity to regulate authority when misused. The individual *satyagrahi* interested in the non-violent pursuit of truth could engage in *voluntary acceptance of austerity/self-sacrifice* to regulate the unjust exercise of authority by the government. It was in this context that Gandhi resurrected the

category of *tapasya* from ancient Indian philosophy. *Tapasya* became the mediating term between *satyagraha* and the individual's control of collective power: "To the orthodox Hindus I need not point out the sovereign efficacy of tapasya (self-suffering). And Satyagraha is nothing but *tapasya* for truth" (Gandhi 1947, Vol. 28, p. 487; also Gandhi, quoted in Dalton 2004, p. 34).

Gandhi thought of *tapasya* as the voluntary acceptance of austerity/self-sacrifice, which by disciplining of an individual's body and mind, helped her to overcome ego-centric deceptions and arrive at the truth in conflict situations. *Tapasya* was prompted equally by a deference for the hostile other as for oneself. As such equality of deference *tapasya* transformed the *satyagrahi* by the experience of loving her opponent. This transformation also helped the *satyagrahi* to come closer to truth because the voluntary acceptance of pain helped her to overcome emotions like anger and retaliation which had obstructed her understanding of matters of fact. On the other side, the initially hostile opponent also found herself transformed by the *satyagrahi's* love and self-sacrifice. The love evoked by the *satyagrahi's tapasya* became a prelude to negotiations between them in order to arrive at the truth and redress injustice.

At this point it is interesting to examine the appropriation of Gandhi's *satyagraha* by political leaders in contemporary Indian politics. In this context, one can look at the contemporary practices of expressing protest by engaging in relay hunger strikes and *dharna*s which claim to be inspired by Gandhi. Such *dharna*s and relay hunger strikes are often led by leaders (who might be strangers to the life of self-restraint) with the object of embarrassing the authorities. Note that while speaking about the requisite qualifications for a *satyagrahi* Gandhi made it apparent that: "….it is often forgotten that it is never the intention of a satyagrahi to embarrass the wrong-doer. The appeal is never to his fear; it is, must be, always to his heart" (Murti 1970, p. 43). In a Gandhian framework, the contemporary practice of sitting *dharna* to embarrass those in authority would involve a lack of commitment to truth and an absence of love for the opponent. Gandhi had himself said:

> Some students have revived the ancient form of barbarity in the form of 'sitting dharna'…. I call it 'barbarity', for it is a crude way of using coercion…. If we fight our opponent, we at least expect him to return the blow. But when we challenge him to walk over us, *Knowing* that he will not, we place him in a most awkward and humiliating position (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 178).

Gandhi described such practices as "worse than *Duragraha*[5]" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 178).

A last argument to explain Gandhi's connection between *satyagraha* and *swaraj/* home rule came from Gandhi's understanding of the spirit of nationalism in a plural

[5] Gandhi made a distinction between *satyagraha* and *Duragraha*. He argued that only those people were fit to be civil resisters/*satyagrahis*, who were self restrained and above criminal disobedience or violence. A form of protest that involved any violence, even the pelting of stones, could not be described as *satyagraha*. Again if the protestors did not feel full of love for the opponents and sought to humiliate them such a protest could be described as *Duragraha*.

state. Gandhi had dealt with four serious conflicts—with the racial other, the colonial other, the religious other and the caste other. This made him argue that *satyagraha* as a non-violent resistance to untruth was the only way out of conflicts characterized by serious differences. Gandhi argued:

> In a vast country like this, there must be room for all schools of honest thought. And the least, therefore, that we owe to ourselves, as to others, is to try to understand the opponents view-point and, if we cannot accept it, to respect it as fully as we expect him to respect ours. It is one of the indispensable tests of a healthy public life, and therefore, fitness for swaraj (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 319).

The demands of diversity in a religiously and ethnically plural democratic state made it indispensable for each citizen to attempt to arrive at the truth by a method that sought to do justice to the viewpoints of conflicting others while seeking justice for herself.

Like Rawls, Gandhi was interested in reconciling the freedom of all with the freedom of each. Unlike Rawls, he did not try to construct a theory of justice independently of rival religious accounts of the good about which those religious accounts could later form an overlapping consensus. Gandhi tried to come to a stable account of justice as balancing the freedom of each, with the freedom of all, by asking each citizen to negotiate differences through love/*ahimsa* in the interest of arriving at the truth as a basis for collective life. The insistence on *ahimsa* can also be explained if one recalls that Gandhi thought of home rule in democratic terms as *poorna swaraj* and that he had made a connection between democracy and non-violence. Violence was non-democratic in more ways than one—it could be exercised only by a select few, the strong in body or perhaps the armed. It also destroyed opposition and could not tolerate difference. Non-violence (on the other hand) was democratic. It could be exercised by the weakest, by children, women and men, as well as by the strongest. No weapon (or wealth to acquire such weapons) was required by the *satyagrahi* and he/she respected even the difference to which he/she was opposed. It was because non-violence was democratic (the possibility of *tapasya* was equally open for all individuals) that, as Gandhian *satyagraha,* it reconciled the freedom of each with the freedom of all: "My notion of democracy is that under it the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest. That can never happen except through non-violence" (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol. VI, p. 447). "Science of non-violence can alone lead one to pure democracy" (Gandhi, in Narayan 1995, vol. VI, p. 446).

This was the significance of Gandhi's connection between *satyagraha* (which was nothing but the exercise of non-violence) and freedom/*swaraj* for political life in a plural and deeply divided democratic nation state.

5.1.3 **Ram Rajya***:* **Swaraj** *for the Prince and the Peasant*

> *Swaraj* is synonymous with Rama raj—the establishment of the Kingdom of righteousness on Earth (Gandhi, in Bose 1948, p. 255).

Gandhi's understanding that *satyagraha* protected freedom was structured into his description of free India as *Ram Rajya*. It is interesting that Gandhi who was deeply sensitive to religious pluralism should have chosen to describe *swaraj*/home rule as *Ram Rajya.* In this context it is important to note that Gandhi was clear that in invoking the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *ramanama* the India which he was *imagining* was not a Hindu India, but a just India, which would ensure equal respect for all religions and all citizens:

> I laugh within myself when someone objects that Rama or the chanting of Ramanama is for the Hindus only, how can Mussalmans therefore take part in it? Is there one God for the Mussalmans and another for the Hindus, Parsis, or Christians? No, there is only one God and we remember Him by the name which is most familiar to us…. My Rama… is not the historical Rama, the son of Dashratha, the King of Ayodhya. He is the eternal, the unborn…. He belongs equally to all (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 81).

Gandhi had often declared that of the religious books of the Hindus the books which he admired the most were the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Bhagavad Gītā*. The *Rāmāyaṇa* was the story of a righteous king. In its many versions, it still remains a powerful symbol of the victory of good over evil. Lord Rama was a righteous ruler known for giving justice to the meekest in his kingdom. It was this sense of justice which compelled him to leave Ayodhya, abdicating his throne to a younger brother, because he wanted to help his father honour the promises he had made to the queen Kaikeyi. While Rama was in exile (in the forest) his wife Sita was abducted by the *asura* king Ravana. However, her love for Rama, and her determined resistance to Ravana's will (even in his captivity), kept her safe from his attentions. Finally, Hanuman and an army of monkeys rescued Sita from the stronghold of Ravana. The army was armed with (not much more than) the love for Rama in their hearts. There is an interesting image in the *Rāmāyaṇa,* of Hanuman, tearing open his heart to reveal the Rama in his heart. This depiction of Rama in the heart is perhaps a metaphor to suggest that Hanuman was dedicated to a life of God as truth/goodness. Gandhi spoke about this image of Hanuman. Interestingly, he reconstructed the image of Rama in Hanuman's heart as a metaphor for his own non-violent commitment to truth and the establishment of a form of home rule where there would be equal deference for the rights of all:

> Hanuman tore open his heart and showed that there was nothing there but Ramanama. I have none of the power of Hanuman to tear open my heart, but if any of you feel inclined to do it, I assure you will find nothing there but love for Rama whom I see face to face in the starving millions of India (Gandhi, in Bose 1948, p. 255).

The *Rāmāyaṇa* is primarily symbolic of the victory of good over evil. There were three aspects to Gandhi's invocation of *Rama Rajya*. Firstly, he wanted to use the story of the just king Rama as a metaphor to suggest that securing freedom for India had to be done in a righteous or non-violent manner. Such purity of means would lead to the establishment of free India as a kingdom of righteousness where there would be justice for the weakest. In this context Gandhi argued:

> By Ramarajya I do not mean Hindu raj. I mean by Ramarajya Divine Raj, the Kingdom of God. For me Rama and Rahim are one…. I acknowledge no other God but the one God of

> truth and righteousness. Whether Rama of my imagination ever lived or not the ancient ideal of Ramarajya is undoubtedly one of true democracy in which the meanest citizen could be sure of swift justice without an elaborate and costly procedure. Even the dog is described by the poet to have received justice under Ramarajya (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 326).

> *Ramarajya* of my dream ensures rights alike of prince and pauper (Gandhi in Bose 1948, p. 91).

The second aspect of the metaphor was that of the story of the *Rāmāyaṇa* as a story of the triumph of truth/good over deceit/bad. It is interesting in this context to think of the difference between the depiction of the war in the *Mahabharata* with the portrayal of the just war between Rama and Ravana. The *Rāmāyaṇa* was full of symbols of the victory of good over evil. It may be recalled that in the *Rāmāyaṇa,* the unjust and strong *asura* army was defeated by the force of love for Rama in the hearts of Hanuman and his band of monkeys. There was also the powerful symbol of the virtuous Sita whose non-violent resistance to Ravana kept her virtue secure in captivity. These were powerful metaphors for the *satyagrahi* Indians who would protect/retain their freedom with the force of *ahimsa* as love force/truth force.

Lastly, Gandhi's use of *Ram Rajya* is also significant for the reason that by the use of that word Gandhi thought of *swaraj* for India in terms that came from the historical memories of India rather than in terms of borrowed imaginations.

> By political independence I do not mean an imitation of the British House of commons, or the soviet rule of Russia or the fascist rule of Italy or the Nazi rule of Germany. They have systems suited to their genius. We must have ours suited to ours. What that can be is more than I can tell. I have described it as Ramarajya i.e., sovereignty of the people based on pure moral authority (Prabhu and Rao (ed.) 2007, p. 326).

5.2 The Interrogative Outsider: Reconstructing Tagore's Notion of Freedom

Tagore sharply disagreed with Gandhi's use of moral and religious arguments in connection with *swarajya*. This section examines Tagore's conception of individual freedom and its philosophical implications in terms of bringing him closer to the Enlightenment and its central figures like Kant. Tagore's conception of freedom is discussed across two subsections. The first examines his idea that individual freedom primarily meant an individual's freedom to reason or a freedom in the mind. There is an attempt to philosophically reconstruct this notion by employing Kant's argument about the Enlightenment as consisting chiefly in a human being's freedom in the public use of his/her reason. The second subsection argues that though Kant's argument about the Enlightenment is philosophically useful in understanding what Tagore meant by freedom, an important philosophical caveat needs to be made. Freedom to reason in Tagore can be philosophically understood by taking a limited clue from Derek Parfit's conception of the individual's freedom to respond to reasons in forming her beliefs and in choosing a course of action. Consequently, there was a

significant philosophical difference between Kant and Tagore. Tagore accorded a priority to the individual's freedom to understand and respond to reasons rather than to rationality as a differentiating feature of a human being *qua* human being.

5.2.1 *Tagore's* Swarajya*: A Kantian Reconstruction*

As seen in Chap. 4, Tagore's debate with Gandhi is relevant to a reconstruction of his idea of freedom given that freedom was a central issue in that debate. Tagore insisted on the individual's freedom to reason. For him collective freedom from colonialism could not be secured by any means which involved unquestioning individual subservience to collective ideology. In this view it was the mentality of "obedience" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 78) that destroyed individual freedom. A philosophically useful parallel could be drawn to Kant's definition of the Enlightenment as the human being's emergence from a self-incurred minority to freedom in the "public" use of his/her reason.

The parallel to Kant and the Enlightenment should not however be taken to mean that Tagore can be completely aligned to a Kantian universalism. The point of invoking Kant (in this section) is only to discuss arguments from Kant's essay on the Enlightenment which could be philosophically useful in reconstructing Tagore's notion of freedom. Though I am not competent to engage in this debate at the level of historical arguments, one can note that there are no direct references to Kant in the collected works of Tagore in Bengali as well as in *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore* (brought out in three volumes by the Sahitya Akademi). However, Tagore's essays on aesthetics point clearly to his familiarity with the ideas of Kant. His father Debendranath Tagore is known to have read Kant in Shimla in 1856. Tagore's older brother Dwijendranath (1840–1926) too, had read Kant. The poem *Purnima* (the Full-Moon Night) in Tagore's *Chitra* (*Rabindra Rachanabali*, 1961, vol. I, p. 506) seem to clearly evoke *The Critique of Judgment*. In particular, in terms of Tagore's reference to "panditer lekha/samalochanar tattva" (writings of a scholar, literary theory),[6] Kalyan Sengupta suggests the Tagore and Kant link (Sengupta 2005, pp. 73, 75; Palmer 2001, pp. 145–146; Kampchen 1991). It may be noted that the Bengali renaissance of which Tagore was an integral part was significantly influenced by the European Enlightenment.

There are three points which might be useful in constructing a philosophical parallel between Tagore and Kant. These will be conceptually useful in understanding Tagore's opposition to the Gandhian understanding of *swaraj* as moral self-rule. These are as follows:

1. Kant understood freedom as primarily in the individual mind and in the individual's public exercise of his/her reason. In his essay, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment", Kant explains that *"Enlightenment is the*

[6] I am indebted for these points to Ranjit Kumar Dev Goswami.

human being's emergence from his self-incurred minority" (Kant 1996, p. 1) All that is required for this is that an individual be free to use his/her reason. In this context Kant made a distinction between the *public* and *private* use of reason and argued that the former was the sort of freedom which promoted Enlightenment amongst a people. He clarified:

> But by the public use of one's own reason I understand the use which someone makes of it *as a scholar before the entire public of the world of readers*. What I call the private use of reason is that which one may make of it in a certain civil post or office with which he is entrusted (Kant 1996, p. 3).

2. Secondly, there was Kant's idea that freedom in the public exercise of his/her reason is individual man's "original vocation" (Kant 1996, p. 5). Kant made this point in the context of the counter argument that religion could be regarded as outside the purview of an individual's freedom to reason as religion was an "unalterable creed". Kant argued that for a society of clergymen to conspire to bind an age to a position where "…it would be impossible for it to enlarge its cognitions…. would be a crime against human nature, whose original vocation lies precisely in such progress" (Kant 1996, p. 5). In this view, those who put the people under such a "yoke" may themselves be compelled by them at a later time: "…so harmful is it to implant prejudices, because they finally take their revenge on the very people who, or whose predecessors, were their authors" (Kant 1996, p. 2). Therefore, a revolution can never bring about "…a true reform in one's way of thinking; instead new prejudices will serve just as well as old ones to harness the great unthinking masses" (1996, p. 2).
3. The third insight from Kant which is relevant in this context is the relation between a greater degree of civil freedom and the individual's freedom to make a public use of his/her reason. According to Kant the former "seems advantageous" (1996, p. 8) to the latter but may also nevertheless put up barriers to it. Thus, when there is progress in

> …the propensity and calling to *think* freely, the latter gradually works back upon the mentality of the people (which thereby gradually become capable of *freedom* in acting) and eventually even upon the principles of *government*, which finds it profitable to itself to treat the human being… in keeping with his dignity.

Tagore could be reconstructed as philosophically close to Kant's arguments about freedom and the Enlightenment. In his exchanges with Gandhi, across the pages of the National newspapers, Tagore demonstrated his own commitment to individual freedom in the "public" (Kant 1996, p. 3) use of reason. In this context, one must note that Tagore was critical of the tendency in the non-cooperation movement to obstruct an individual's free public use of his/her reason. He made this point in unambiguous terms in "The Call of Truth" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008):

> To-day in the atmosphere of the country there is a spirit of persecution, which is not that of armed force, but something still more alarming because it is invisible. I found, further that those who had their doubts as to the present activities, if they happened to whisper them out, however cautiously, however guardedly, felt some admonishing hand clutching them within. There was a newspaper which one day had the temerity to disapprove, in a feeble

way, of the burning of cloth. The very next day the editor was shaken out of his balance by the agitation of his readers. How long would it take for the fire which was burning cloth to reduce his paper to ashes?… What I heard on every side was, that reason, and culture as well, must be closured (p. 78).

It is possible to reconstruct Tagore's argument about individual freedom as close to Kant on all the three points noted above. To begin with the central Kantian insight was that an individual's freedom was primarily constituted by the freedom to make public use of his/her reason. In this context it is important to note that in his arguments against the non-cooperation movement Tagore had argued that freedom was primarily based in the human mind. In a letter written from New York to his countrymen he said that

…real freedom is of the mind and spirit, it can never come to us from outside. He only has freedom who ideally loves freedom himself and is glad to extend it to others. He who cares to have slaves must chain himself to them; he who builds walls to create exclusion for others builds walls across his own freedom; he who distrusts freedom in others…. sooner or later he is lured into the meshes of physical and moral servility (Tagore 1996a, p. 545).

Tagore's objection to the national movement organized under Gandhi was precisely that appropriation into a homogenized collective self denied the individual a right to reason and differ. He said:

….while creating man's mind, God did not have for his model the spider mentality doomed to a perpetual conformity in its production of web and that it is an outrage upon human nature to force it through a mill and reduce it to some standardized commodity of uniform shape and size (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 99).

Further, Tagore argued that any unthinking creed like the *mantra* of *charkha* and the associated impurity of foreign cloth could itself become a fresh prejudice in the mind of a people already riddled with "unreason" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 159). Unthinking obedience was, in itself, a negation of the freedom of the mind. Therefore, Tagore argued: "A man like the Mahatma" may be able to get the allegiance of the people to common programmes for, "To obey him is for them an end in itself. To me it seems that such a state of mind is not helpful for the attainment of *swaraj*" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 119).

Kant's argument that the free exercise of the public use of an individual's reason is part of individual man's original vocation was also reiterated by Tagore in his own way. In this context Tagore used the term *dharma*. "When we know the highest ideal of freedom which a man has, we know his *dharma*, the essence of his nature, the real meaning of his self" (Tagore, Sādhanā in 2012a, vol. IV, pp. 121–122). Just as "The freedom of the seed is in the attainment of its *dharma*, its nature and destiny of becoming a tree" (Tagore, Sādhanā in 2012a, vol. IV, p. 121). So too, individual man is "….absolutely bankrupt if… (he is) deprived of this speciality, this individuality…. It is most valuable because it is not universal" (Tagore, Sādhanā in 2012a, vol. IV, pp.117–118), for "The home of freedom is in the spirit of man. That spirit refuses to recognize any limit to action, or to knowledge" (Chung et al. 2011, p. 242). It was because he believed that man's true

nature/vocation can be attained only by reasoning and acting in freedom that Tagore insisted on the right of the individual to differ from the group and to make mistakes.

Tagore can also be reconstructed as being in agreement with Kant's third argument that a greater degree of civil freedom follows upon freedom in the mind rather than the other way round. In this context Tagore had said (quite prophetically) that: "Alien government in India is a chameleon. Today it comes in the guise of the Englishmen; tomorrow… it may take the shape of our own countrymen" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 25). For what is needed is not political self-government as much as "change of mentality" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 116). However, notwithstanding his stress on man's freedom to reason, Tagore insisted on greater civil freedom and the negative liberty of the individual. He argued that:

> The passage of our self is through its self-hood which is independent of its attainment of soul, which is harmonious. So our will, in the history of its growth, must come through independence and rebellion to ultimate completion. We must have the possibility of the negative form of freedom which is license, before we can attain the positive freedom which is love (Tagore, in Sādhanā 2012a, vol. IV, p. 128).

Tagore's understanding of freedom can be best reconstructed as primarily an individual's freedom in the mind reflected first in ideas and thereafter in action. *Gora* (written in the period of the *swadeshi* movement) can be read as Tagore's fictional account of the individual's progress to such freedom/*swaraj.* (Tagore 2003) This novel can be interpreted (in terms of the philosophical parallel with Kant's understanding of the Enlightenment) as the literary exploration of a human being's emergence from a self-imposed *minority* to freedom in the public use of his reason. The chief protagonist of this novel is a young reformer Gora who at first attempts to combat colonialism by an aggressive but indigenous traditional Brahmanism. His exclusive Brahmanism transforms itself into a strain of nationalism inspired by the nativism of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya. This novel is organized around a series of events that constitute an attack on Gora's exclusive nationalism and self-definition. The journey by which he eventually overcomes these ideologies, realizing that "by mere imitation we shall eventually be neither one thing nor the other" (Tagore, *Gora*, quoted in Nandy 1994, p. 37) constitute Gora's progress to true freedom. Tagore's conception of freedom, was chiefly opposed to the coercion of the individual into endorsing *collective* understanding and losing his/her freedom to reason in the claims of conforming to the demands made by collective identity. This is reflected in the novel by the dramatic manoeuvre of Gora's birth. It turns out that Gora's self-understanding in terms of an uncritical belonging to various collective selves was inauthentic and dissembling. For he was not a part of the Hindu, Indian or Brahmin self. In the story he discovers that he was the son of an Irish couple abandoned during the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. It was only after this progressive freedom from various collective selves/guardians/ideologies that Gora grew into a sense of his own individual freedom.

Given that Tagore can be philosophically reconstructed along the lines of Kant's thinking about individual freedom and the Enlightenment, it becomes easier to

understand his arguments against collectives. With its inevitable association to organized power for perpetuation of itself a collective inevitably creates the *silenced insider*. This difficulty with organized collectives is apparent in Tagore's criticism of nationalism and of the national movement under the leadership of Gandhi. It also becomes clear in his idea of the religion of man which leans towards simple folk religion rather than formal institutionalized religion with theological structures.

5.2.2 Tagore: Freedom, Reason and Rationality

Tagore was influenced by the Enlightenment and the work of the leading figures of the Enlightenment like Kant is useful in making a philosophical reconstruction of his understanding of freedom. However, Tagore's emphasis on the individual's freedom to reason was philosophically uncompromising. Such an emphasis can explain why Tagore could not endorse the idea of universal reason or a categorical imperative, which could ground individual reasons for acting in a certain way or for believing in something. It may be recalled that for Kant, both the authority and the content, of the categorical imperative are to be understood with reference to the requirements of rational agency rather than to some independent conception of the reasons people have for what they believe in and do. T.M. Scanlon describes what he calls the "Kantian constructivism about reasons":

> Claims about reasons (more exactly, about what a person must see as reasons) must be grounded in claims about rational agency, claims about what attitudes a person can take, consistent with seeing herself as a rational agent. Justification never runs in the opposite direction, from claims about reasons to claims about what rationality requires (Parfit 2013, p. xxiv).

In Tagore, claims about the individual's freedom to respond to reason (what he calls freedom in the mind) are not grounded on any commitment to a *prior claim* about rational agency. Therefore, there is no commitment to a Kantian conception of universal reason. Individual freedom to respond to reasons is more fundamental than any claims of human rationality and universal reason.

The freedom to reason/in the mind that Tagore argued about can be philosophically reconstructed by taking a clue from Derek Parfit's conception of the individual's freedom to respond to reasons in forming her beliefs and in acting in certain ways. By saying this I do not mean to suggest that Tagore supported Parfit's wider theory, i.e., any version of non-metaphysical non-naturalist cognitivism. Tagore argued that the primary sense of freedom was that individual man *qua* man must be free to respond to reasons or apparent reasons in forming beliefs and acting on them. It is important to understand how Tagore conceived the relationship between an individual's free response to reasons and her rationality as a human being *qua* human being.

Tagore's insistence upon an individual's freedom in the mind can be understood as primarily a freedom from coercion and deception in responding to reasons. In this view, an individual must be significantly free from being coerced and deceived if there is to be the possibility of consent/dissent when she responds to reasons or apparent reasons. Tagore spoke about coercion at length. He understood coercion as being of two kinds: that by the group or collective and that by one's own assertive ego and its desires/passions. Tagore argued that a loss of individual freedom in collective identity—whether religious or national—was an absolute loss. It was in this context that he argued against nation, the national movement and the coercion of traditional beliefs. As he argued: "To invoke the fear of ancestors rotting in hell, or to ostracize someone from the community, setting fire to homes or the nightmare of being beaten on the road are some of the ways of establishing a slavish mentality in our hearts" (Tagore, in Alam and Chakravarty 2011, p. 128).

However, for Tagore there could be a more insidious form of coercion which could come from an inflated sense of the self and the way in which an individual lived her life. Freedom of the mind could be lost on account of deception, more specifically, on account of self-deception. On this view an individual could be significantly coerced by her own self and her desires and passions. Tagore completely rejected a desire based theory of reasons. Egoistic desires and passions which there was no reason to have could not for him be legitimate or *freely* chosen reasons for an individual's beliefs and actions. In *The Home and the World* he portrayed the coercive nature of the passion for Sandip that destroyed the freedom to respond to reasons in the mind of his heroine Bimala (see a longer discussion on this novel in Chap. 4). The portrayal of Bimala is interesting because with her introduction to modern education she comes progressively to disregard coercive obligations to the traditional social structure of which she is a part. The strength of her desires and passions for Sandip overcome the sense of obligation she feels towards her traditional role in her husband's family. In constructing the character of Bimala, Tagore explored the intimate connections between ego-driven desire/passion and self-deceptions. Bimala's passionate desire for Sandip was driven by her need for egoistic gratification in an inflated self-image reinforced by (what she felt) was Sandip's desire for her.

There was an intimate connection between her desires and her self-deceptions. Sandip's attempts to flatter her by calling her the "Queen Bee" or a "living flame" (Tagore, *The Home and the World* 2012b, vol. III, p. 246) was only successful as it reiterated Bimala's own somewhat enhanced self-image. It was the need to keep that egoistic self-image a going concern in her life that gave further impetus to her desires and passion for him. Bimala could not grow into a freedom to respond to reasons on account of her own self-deceptions as much as on account of the lies spun for her by Sandip. Tagore saw self-driven passions and desires as not only coercive but also as the chief source of deceptions. Such misplaced emotions obstructed the individual's knowledge of what was going on and thereby restricted her freedom to think. Christine Korsgaard comments made in another context are as useful to recollect here as in the context of Gandhi's understanding of *swarajya:*

> People cannot assent to a way of acting when they are given no chance to do so. The most obvious instance of this is when coercion is used. But it is also true of deception.... Knowledge of what is going on and some power over the proceedings are the conditions of possible assent (Parfit 2013, p. 177).

Though Tagore shared the Enlightenment belief that a human being's reason distinguished her from any other being the temptation to philosophically appropriate Tagore to a position very close to Kant is philosophically implausible. There was a philosophically significant difference between Kant and Tagore. In that Tagore accorded a priority to the individual's freedom to understand and respond to reasons rather than to rationality as a differentiating feature of a human being *qua* human being. For Tagore, an individual is rational when she does not believe blindly/obey passionately but responds to reasons or apparent reasons. Individual acts are rational when, if individual beliefs are true, she would be doing what she had good reasons to do.

Tagore understood *swaraj* as both individual and collective. Like Gandhi he thought collective freedom must be based on individual freedom. However, unlike Gandhi he argued that freedom was primarily in the individual's mind. Freedom in the mind was not to be curtailed by any a priori conception of what it meant to be a rational agent *qua* rational agent. The significant sense of freedom was for an individual to be free to respond to reasons in what she believed and did. Free response to reasons implied the absence of coercion from the group, but it also meant that the individual could form an independent conception of what constituted an appropriate reason for her. On this view if individual reasons were to be defined in terms of the requirements of universal reason or an a priori conception of rational agency they would no longer be free. This understanding of freedom reconciles Tagore's rejection of nationalism with his respect for difference. Tagore's rejection of nationalism did not come from a commitment to a cosmopolitanism and a vision of universal reason. It came from the conviction that an individual could respond freely to legitimate reasons (independently of a sense of collective belonging) in what she believed and did. Such reasons could be good reasons if the individual was significantly free of self-deception and not overcome by desires when she formed them as the basis of beliefs even if they were not reasons that all human beings could share by virtue of being human. This then was the critical sense of individual freedom in Tagore.

5.3 Conflicting Conceptions of *Swaraj*: Tagore and Gandhi

The differences between Gandhi and Tagore on the nature of freedom can be understood as centring on two points: the emphasis on the unique individual in Tagore went against Gandhi's faith in the collective; Tagore's emphasis on the individual freedom to reason made him oppose Gandhian *swaraj* as moral self-mastery. This last section discusses these two points of difference.

The first reason Tagore and Gandhi could not agree on an understanding of *swaraj* was that Gandhi's idea of *swaraj* was conceptually reliant on both *collective*

understanding and *collective* action. There was a reliance on collective understanding and collective memory in Gandhi's dialogue with tradition, and on collective action, in Gandhi's conception of *satyagraha.* Tagore argued that such a reliance obstructed individual freedom. It is instructive to recall that Marjorie Sykes (who had spent time both at Santiniketan and at Gandhi's *ashram*) put the difference between the two in the following manner: "…there was a divergence of temperament between Gandhi and Tagore…. Tagore's unspoken concern was to guard the integrity of personal action. Gandhi turned his mind to the administrative question of how any particular programme might be carried out… at state level…" (Patel and Sykes 1987, p. 62). More recently, Sabyasachi Bhattacharya has re-emphasized the point that Tagore had an "individualistic notion of freedom" (Bhattacharya 2008, p. 27) and that this led his contemporaries to argue that "Tagore's idea of freedom hampered collective action" (Bhattacharya 2008, p. 28). It is this emphasis on the unique individual which (as noted in Chap. 4) makes it difficult to think of Tagore as either a nationalist or as a cosmopolitan.

Gandhi had explained individual freedom as self-rule or self-restraint. He made it clear that the moral possibility of becoming free of deceptions instigated by an egoistic sense of the self could only be premised on a life of virtue. It is in this context that Gandhi had reinterpreted the traditional *yama* and *niyama* of ancient Indian philosophy and made philosophical connections between the five *yama*s to argue towards the unity of the good human life. In making such reinterpretations and philosophical connections Gandhi went to traditional understandings of the *yama/niyama* as they were presented in the *Yoga Sūtra* and in Jainism. Gandhi had a clear sense of philosophical comfort with the conception of tradition as collective understanding. He had often noted, for instance, that: "Environment does play an important part, but the original capital on which a child starts in life is inherited from its ancestors" (Gandhi, in Bose 1948, p. 263). Though scholars, for instance, Parekh (1989, p. 77), have argued that Gandhi's dialogue with other traditions was prompted by the insight that Hinduism could not be reformed only through its internal resources, it is difficult to overlook Gandhi's arguments about the importance of the *collective* understanding represented in tradition. In the context of *swaraj*, Gandhi employed notions of self-restraint and virtues which he considerably reinterpreted but nevertheless took from tradition.

The sense of the shared collective past in tradition involved a reliance on collective understanding and memory. Tagore felt that such a reliance was contrary to the individual's freedom to reason. He argued, "Nothing is worse than one section of the populace enslaving the opinions of another through force and against their will…." (Tagore, in Alam and Chakravarty 2011, p. 129). This becomes especially evident in Tagore's play *The Kingdom of Cards* and in his differences with Gandhi's positions on *varna*. The reliance on the shared past, as essential to the colonial Indian's sense of self/*swa,* was implicit in the Gandhian idea of *swaraj*/self-rule mediated through obedience to traditional ethical conceptions. Tagore felt that an individual's freedom as the freedom to reason could not be premised on the shared collective understanding of self-restraint as obedience to the traditional *yama/niyama*. For Tagore, while the notion of sharing as a collective sense of belonging to a

society or a civilization was non-problematic, the freedom of the individual to interrogate and question that sharing was critical if the self was to be a free member of that society. Consequently, Tagore rejected Gandhi's insistence on an unquestioning reliance on the collective understanding of ethical rules in his interpretation of individual freedom as moral self-mastery. Tagore argued: "It is our misfortune that even though we desire freedom, we really do not believe in it. We do not have the patience to respect the intelligence of others; we only seek to terrorize and dominate that intelligence" (Tagore, in Alam and Chakravarty 2011, p. 128).

Gandhi's conception of *swaraj* was not only related to collective understanding, but also to collective action/*satyagraha. Satygraha* as I argued in the previous section was the means to protect Gandhian *swaraj.* Gandhian *satyagraha* (ever since its inception in South Africa) had taken the form of mass *collective* non-violent resistance to untruth. Tagore recovered the element of coercion of the individual in an implicit mass obedience to collective programmes like the non-cooperation movement. He argued against the loss of the individual freedom to reason in the implicit obedience demanded by the very idea of collective action. In this view, the Gandhian conception of *satyagraha* coerced both the insider and the outsider. The insider (or the individual who became a part of collective action) was compelled to obey the leader and coerced not to respond to what might appear to be good contrary reasons. In this connection, Tagore argued:

> Crowd psychology is a blind force. Like steam and other physical forces it can be utilized for creating a tremendous amount of power. And therefore rulers of men, who, out of greed and fear, are bent upon turning their people into machines of power try to train this crowd psychology for their special purposes…. The individual thinks even when he feels; but the same individual when he feels with the crowd does not reason at all. His moral sense becomes blurred. This suppression of higher humanity in crowd minds is productive of enormous strength (Tagore 1996b, p. 549).

However, Tagore also argued against the loss of freedom involved in coercion of the outsider (one who was not part of the movement) by the collective self engaged in that movement. Tagore perhaps positioned himself as the interrogative outsider being coerced by the collective self. Such insights led Tagore to reiterate his commitment to the unique individual and his/her freedom to reason at many places: "Therefore I do not put my faith in any new institution but in the individuals all over the world who think clearly, feel nobly, and act rightly, thus becoming the channels of moral truth" (Tagore 1996c, p. 551).

In sharp contrast, Gandhi reiterated his belief in collective action in "The Poet and the *Charkha*":

> The poet thinks that the *charkha* is calculated to bring about a deathlike sameness in the nation and thus imagining he would shun it if he could. The truth is that the *charkha* is intended to realize the essential and living oneness of interest among India's myriads (Gandhi, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 124).

For Gandhi, collective action (as for instance that involved in mass spinning) was based on a "oneness of interest" and protected the *swaraj* of both the individual self and of the collective self. In this view, the realisation of a oneness of interest, in

(and by) collective action, would help the fragmented Indian polity to imagine an Indian nation and thereby achieve collective freedom as home rule. The ability to collectively imagine India was an essential prerequisite for the collective effort to secure political rights and liberty from the colonizer. At the same time the collective engagement in spinning was also a part of the individual's own progress towards individual freedom as moral self-mastery. This was because as a form of *bread labour* spinning formed a part of Gandhi's expanded list of virtues. Gandhi argued that an individual's engagement in collective non-violent action (such as spinning or *satyagraha*), could play a role in the individual's own effort to secure freedom as self-rule, simply because it strengthened the individual's practice of *ahimsa* by the strength of the collective *ahimsa* of which she had become a part. For Tagore, on the other hand, the regimented oneness involved in collective action or mass programmes enforced an artificial demand for mutual belonging. Such a demand could be satisfied only by imposing a sameness and homogeneity which destroyed individual freedom and the ability to use one's own reason.

The second point of difference between Tagore and Gandhi came from the opposition between Tagore's emphasis on the connection between freedom and individual reason and Gandhi's idea of *swarajya* as moral self-mastery. One may of course argue that there need be no essential opposition between the freedom to reason and moral self-rule. It may be recalled that in Kant moral autonomy involves obedience to a self-legislated categorical imperative or a law of universal reason. However, it can be argued that an understanding of individual moral autonomy as obedience to a law of universal reason would be equally at variance with Tagore's idea of individual freedom. For the imposition involved in confirming to a categorical imperative derived from a shared conception of universal reason would conflict with Tagore's emphasis on an individual's freedom in the mind. Consequently, one can argue that Tagore's understanding of individual freedom would be as opposed to the law of universal reason, as it was, to received ideas from tradition. In this connection, it is interesting to remember that Tagore was even opposed to making promises that could bind an individual for the future. Promise keeping (in his view) would compromise the individual's freedom to respond to a reason, which presented itself after the promise had been made. In this context one may recall that Amartya Sen relates an interesting incident in his comment on the debate between Gandhi and Tagore:

> Tagore's deep aversion to any commitment to the past that could not be modified by contemporary reason extended even to the alleged virtue of invariably keeping past promises. On one occasion when Mahatma Gandhi visited Tagore's school at Santiniketan, a young woman got him to sign her autograph book. Gandhi wrote: 'Never make a promise in haste. Having once made it fulfil it at the cost of your life.' When he saw this entry, Tagore became agitated. He wrote in the same book a short poem in Bengali to the effect that no one can be made a 'prisoner forever with a chain of clay'. He went on to conclude in English, possibly so that Gandhi could read it too, 'Fling away your promise if it is found to be wrong' (Sen 2005, p. 99).

It is clear that for Tagore any notion of individual freedom as moral *self-mastery* whether conceived in terms of obedience to an a priori law of universal reason or as

uncritical obedience to traditional ethical convictions seriously compromised an individual's freedom in the mind. This led Tagore to oppose Gandhi's arguments for the reconstruction of individual freedom as moral self-rule.

It can be argued that the differences between Tagore and Gandhi on *swaraj* for India emerged from their very different relationships to the central ideas of the Enlightenment. Tagore thought of individual freedom in terms, significantly different from, but nonetheless close to, Kant. Gandhi, on the other hand, remained close to the Indian philosophical tradition, which linked individual freedom to moral progress. The differences between them then were based on deeper philosophical divergences and arguments that might appear from the immediate terms of the debate.

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Chapter 6
Conclusion

Gandhi and Tagore: Life in an Enchanted Cosmos

Abstract The substantial differences between Tagore and Gandhi came from their differently negotiated relationships to tradition and modernity. However, they *shared* a sense of wonder in living life in an enchanted cosmos. Gandhi saw enchantment in truth and Tagore saw enchantment in nature. Gandhi heard the voice of truth as an "inner voice" and Tagore heard the music of the spheres. The important point was that they heard a voice *other* than man. They believed in a world larger than human reality. This distanced them both equally from modernity. For a central idea of the enlightenment and of modernity is its emphatic rejection of a wider order.

Keywords Moral order · Order of truth · Nature · Enchanted cosmos · Soul of the world · Solace · Spiritual reconcilement · Cosmic harmony

This book has been about the Gandhi–Tagore debate. It has argued that though Gandhi and Tagore exchanged arguments about *satyagraha*, the non-cooperation movement and Gandhi's "*mantra*" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 78) connecting "*swaraj* and *charkha*" (Tagore, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 118), there were deeper differences which divided them. The debate was about more fundamental issues such as the nature of truth freedom and the possibilities of untruth that Tagore saw in Gandhi's movements for truth and freedom.

Taking the debate seriously is philosophically important for many reasons. The debate between the two men which was carried on across the pages of national dailies, for a quarter of a century, could not but influence the making of free India. One way in which the debate exerted such an influence was simply by relocating the terms of the debate about India. The central issues were relocated from conflicts about the legitimate Indian self to contesting arguments about the meaning of *swaraj*/freedom and the proper means to freedom. The exchanges in this debate are also important to the philosophical reinterpretation of Gandhi's central ideas and their interconnections. As seen in Chap. 3 (of this book), the debate with Tagore makes it possible to reconstruct the difficulties in interpreting Gandhi's conception of truth as primarily relativist. The fact that Gandhi contested Tagore's arguments about the possibilities of untruth in his methods to attain *swaraj* shows that Gandhi

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did not believe that truth was relative to an individual's point of view. The debate becomes relevant to understanding Gandhi's positions on moral judgement, moral criticism and the place of moral principles in individual life. Therefore, it presents a philosophical opportunity to rethink Gandhi's truth somewhat differently from Akeel Bilgrami's reconstruction of it as primarily relativist, and of Gandhi as powerfully influenced by the Jain theories of *syadvada* and *anekantavada*. Chapters 2 and 3, and indeed the other chapters in this book, provide philosophical evidence for Richard Sorabji's recent description of Gandhi as a philosopher:

> Was Gandhi a philosopher? Yes, He was forever seeking a consistent rationale for all that he did, and, more than any philosophers I have encountered, he subjected his views to relentless criticism, sometimes his own, but more often that of other people, which he published voluminously in his weekly newspapers. He wrote daily letters and sought to answer criticisms and explain his ideas in relation to new situations. Moreover he thought himself obliged to *live* by what he taught (Sorabji 2012, p. 1).

Next, this debate is relevant to a philosophical reconstruction of Tagore's central ideas and arguments. The debate clarifies, for instance, Tagore's positions on nationalism and cosmopolitanism. It therefore becomes critical to a fairly important debate in contemporary political philosophy, that is, the debate between Nussbaum and her critics about nationalism and cosmopolitanism. Nussbaum argues that *The Home and the World* (Tagore 2012a, p. 299) brings out Tagore's position as anti-nationalist and shows that he was a cosmopolitan. However, the exchanges with Gandhi reveal that Tagore understood individual freedom primarily as an individual's freedom to reason for herself. Tagore argued that individuality and the freedom to reason constituted the *dharma*, or essential nature, of a human being (Tagore, "Sādhanā" in 2012c, p. 121). Since the debate with Gandhi involved arguments against the character of the non-cooperation movement as a collective movement, it reaffirmed Tagore's insistence on the unique individual: "Neither the colourless vagueness of cosmopolitanism, nor the fierce self-idolatry of nation-worship, is the goal of human history" (Tagore 2012b, p. 32).

These points have been explored in the book. Unlike many other commentators on the debate, I have argued that the differences between Tagore and Gandhi were fairly substantial and came from differently negotiated relationships to (and understandings of) tradition and modernity. Tagore was a part of the Bengali renaissance and powerfully influenced by at least one central idea of the Enlightenment. This was the idea that Enlightenment consists in the freedom of the individual to reason for herself. Yet, as has also emerged in the course of this book, it is also true to say that Tagore could not unreflectively be assimilated to the Enlightenment project of Western modernity. There were two reasons for this: the first reason, as discussed in Chap. 5 of the book, is that, unlike Kant, Tagore did not accept a conception of universal reason which defined man *qua* man. The second reason was what brought him fairly close to Gandhi. This was that Tagore completely rejected the anthropocentricism of modernity and shared Gandhi's belief in an enchanted cosmos.

Yet in this, as in everything else, they differed significantly. Gandhi saw the enchanted cosmos in terms of man's place as a moral subject in what was essentially the order of Truth or God. Tagore however saw man in a relationship with both nature and the divine. In this context, there are two interesting arguments with which I would like to end this book. The first being Gandhi's position against the Bihar earthquake and the second, Tagore's understanding of "the music of the spheres" (Bardhan 2008, p. xxx) brought out in his songs and essays on the forest in "Sādhanā". Gandhi believed that man was not at the centre of the universe but part of a wider order. In the arguments he exchanged with Tagore about the Bihar earthquake, he said: "If God is not a personal being for me like my earthly father, He is infinitely more. I believe literally that not a leaf moves but by His will. Every breath I take depends on His sufferance…. God is the law… ." (Gandhi, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 160). Gandhi saw the wider order and God's law as a moral order in the universe. He argued that: "Visitations like droughts, floods, earthquakes and the like, though they seem to have only physical origins, are for me, somehow connected with man's morals. Therefore, I instinctively feel that the earthquake was a visitation for the sin of untouchability" (Gandhi, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 160). Therefore, man, like nature, was subject to a life in a world of God permeated by the moral order in the "indissoluble marriage between matter and spirit" (Gandhi, in Bhattacharya 2008, p. 161).

It is interesting that Tagore wrote a series of essays called "Sādhanā" about his spiritual realization during the same period that he wrote *Gitanjali*, a collection of poems and songs. The *Gitanjali* collection, it may be recalled, had come when Tagore was in his late forties and early fifties. Not all, but very many of the songs in this collection are classified under *puja*/devotional songs (Bardhan 2008, p. xxix). Around the same time (between 1912 and 1913), Tagore wrote the essays in "Sādhanā" where he put forth (what may be described as) his sense of life in an enchanted cosmos. The essays and the *puja* songs in this phase of Tagore's life are therefore connected and it can be said that "… the essays in the Sādhanā collection… illuminate this phase of the song lyrics about his sense of love in many forms" (Bardhan 2008, p. xxix). It is important to note that there is "the mutual permeation of love, worship, music, and nature in his songs" (Bardhan 2008, p. xxxi). In Tagore's understanding of the universe, man could only be thought against the vastness of the cosmos: "We stand before this great world" (Tagore, Sādhanā in 2012c, p. 511). In this view nature was seen as distinct from both the many unique individuals and from divinity. Nature, in fact, constituted the significant *third* as the meeting place of man and God. This was why (as Tagore argued) the forest had so exalted a place in the Indian conception of the contemplative life/*sannyasa*. Tagore affirmed that forests/nature had "a sacred association in the hearts of men as the site of some great spiritual reconcilement where man's soul had its meeting place with the soul of the world" (Tagore 2012c, p. 81).

There are several ideas that Tagore expresses in his songs about nature/*prakṛti*.

> … we hear him address the boatsman/helmsman of life (*jiban-toreer majhi*), or the guardian of destiny (*jiban debata*), sustaining him with a sense of cosmic joy, through his life's crushing grief and loss. We hear his worship of a sense of the sublime in life-the music of the spheres humming within oneself, the cosmic music resonating in the individual soul-making one feel part of the cosmic harmony…. We hear a worshipful yearning to escape confinement (Bardhan 2008, p. xxx).

I would like to make some points about Tagore's understanding of man's relationship with what he calls the "the world and the world's God" (Tagore 2012c, p. 95). One can say that Tagore believed that individual man could go beyond the human world in looking for solace and love. He saw in nature a resource for man when he was grieving and in pain. Second, as a significant and tangible presence between man and the unseen "supreme soul" (Tagore 2012c, p. 96), the natural world presented an opportunity for the individual human soul to transcend "the limits of itself" and escape "the narrow limits of a self" (2012c, p. 92). Third, Tagore sensed, or felt, the enchantment in the natural world as a divine "music" (Tagore's lecture, *Sravan-Sandhya*, trans. by and quoted in Bardhan 2008, p. xxvi). He said: "Whatever the vast nature says—through babble of water, murmur of woods, efflorescence of spring, light of the cloudless autumn sky—is said not in clear words, it is only in hints, in images and in music". For Tagore, man could echo/respond to this music by adding "melody to words" (Tagore, *Sravan-Sandhya*, in Bardhan 2008, p. xxvi).

To look at the lyrics of Tagore's songs as a substantiation of these three points, one can begin by noting Tagore's idea that nature can provide comfort to man. In this context, one can recall the song "*Ke janito tumi dakibe aamare, chhilam nidra-maugono//shongshaar more maha-moho-ghore chhilo shauda ghire shaughono//…. jani na kaukhon koruna-arun uthilo udayachaule, //dekhite dekhite kirane purilo aamar hridoyo-gaugano*". This has been translated by Tagore himself, as follows: "When you called on me I was asleep under the shadows of my walls and I did not hear you…. I started up to see that the sun had risen, that the floodtide had brought the call of the deep, and my boat was ready rocking on the dancing water" (as quoted in Bardhan 2008, p. 158). There is also a sense that nature provides solace to man in the song "*aache dukkho, aache mrityu, birauho-dauhono laage*… ." This has been translated by Tagore himself as follows:

> Through death and sorrow
> there dwells peace
> in the heart of the Eternal.
> Life's current flows without cease,
> the sunlight and starlights
> carry the smile of existence
> and springtime its songs.
> Waves rise and fall,
> the flowers blossom and fade
> and my heart yearns for its place in the feet of the Endless.
>
> (Quoted in Bardhan 2008, p. 160)

The second insight that Tagore shared about nature in the lyrics of his songs (and his music) was that nature presented man with an opportunity to break free of the narrow confines of an individual life. Nature became the place where individual man could feel a love for the world soul and feel in return the world soul's love for her individual life. One can look in this context at Tagore's composition, "*ki gaabo ami, ki shunabo, aji ananda dhaame//... taubo naam loye chandro tara ashim shunye dhaichhe//robi hote grohe jhorichhe prem, groho hote grohe chhaichhe*…." This is translated by Kalpana Bardhan as follows: "What am I to sing, in your house of joy today,…// The moon and stars, singing your name, course in infinite emptiness—// Love streams from the sun to the planet, spreads from planet to planet,… ."// (Bardhan 2008, p. 156).

The third insight in Tagore's music and poetry brought out Tagore's sense of enchantment in the natural world by sharing the music he heard in the "world-poem" and "the law of its rhythms" (Tagore 2012e, p. 137). In this context, he asked: "*Ogo shono ke bajay*… ." (O listen, who plays that music?) (Tagore, in Bose 2012, p. 57). There was also the sense in Tagore of responding to the music of creation by human melodies. He sang, "*Badol-diner prothom kadam phul korechho daan*, *//ami dite eshechhi sravaner gaan*…." This has been translated as follows: "You made me a gift of the rainy season's first-bloomed *kadam*,[1] I've come to give you the brimming *sravan*'s[2] song…." (Bardhan 2008, p. 141–142).

This sense of life in an enchanted cosmos is what brought Gandhi and Tagore together to share the same conceptual space. Gandhi saw enchantment in truth and Tagore saw enchantment in nature. Gandhi heard the voice of truth as an "inner voice" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 32), or "the voice of God" (Prabhu and Rao 2007, p. 33) and Tagore heard the music of the spheres. The important philosophical point was of course that they heard a voice *other* than man. They believed in a world larger than, and not *exhausted by*, human reality. This distanced them both equally from modernity. For a central idea of the Enlightenment and of modernity is an emphatic anthropocentricism and the rejection of a wider order.

The differences between Tagore and Gandhi emerged from the fact that while Tagore negotiated a relationship with modernity by sharing its central belief in the individual's freedom to reason, Gandhi retained the sense of the sacred in tradition. This was expressed in Gandhi's reconstruction of the moral life, primarily in terms of an individual's sense of obligation for traditional rules and vows. However, it can be argued that Tagore's belief in reason did not take him as far away from Gandhi as it could have. For instance, to a conception of an individual moral life as consisting in a shared human obligation to a law of universal reason *qua* categorical imperative. Quite to the contrary, Tagore saw an individual's moral life as an intensely personal relationship between the individual and the cosmic soul which

[1] The Kadamba flower, from the tree *Neolamarckia Kadamba.*

[2] Second month of the Indian monsoon season, usually in July–August (as per Bengali calendar).

was negotiated through nature. The friendship between Tagore and Gandhi, and the area of agreement in their ideas, came from their *shared* sense of wonder in living life in an enchanted cosmos.

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Glossary

Acrasia Much of contemporary philosophical literature takes acrasia/akrasia to be the same thing as weakness of the will

advaita Nonduality; name of a school of Vedānta

ahimsa Non-violence, non-injury/harm; Gandhi often uses the term interchangeably with love

ahimsanat Non-violent

ānanda or ananda Joy or Bliss

Anekantavada or Anekāntavāda The Jain theory of the many aspects of reality

aparigaraha Sometimes translated non-possession but more appropriately as non-acquistiveness

āsana Being still, seated, firm (one of the 'eight-limbs' of yoga)

Ashrams An *Ashrama* (*āśrama*) in Hinduism is one of four stages in a social system as laid out in the *Purāṇas, Manu Smṛti* and later Classical Sanskrit texts. Gandhi's *ashrams* (Phoenix Settlement, The Tolstoy Farm, Sabarmati and Sevagram) were conceived as sites of community living in the interest of truth

asmitā Egoism; abstract noun derived from *asmi* 'I am'

aṣṭānga yoga The 'eight-limbs' of yoga, which are *yama, niyama, āsana, prāṇāyāma, pratyāhāra, dhāraṇā, dhyāna,* and *samādhi*

asteya Non-stealing

āstika In Indian philosophy, any orthodox school of thought, defined as one that accepts the authority of the Vedas (sacred scriptures of ancient India)

ātman Self

baul The bauls are a group of mystic minstrels from Bengal

brahmacharya Celibacy; also refers to the first of four stages into which the Hindus divide a person's life and which requires celibacy

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Brahman The Absolute Reality. The ground/basis of the world

charkha Spinning wheel

cit or chit Consciousness; spirit

Citta or chitta Apperception or apperceptive reason. That which gathers and integrates all knowledge in man and consitutes his apperceptive mind

Dalit Lit., 'the oppressed'; name preferred by 'untouchables' for themselves

dhāraṇā Fixing attention (one of the 'eight-limbs' of yoga)

dharma (n.) morality, ethics, ethical thing, item identified by a moral theory, that is, a normative theory selected for its social implications; (adj.): ethical, moral

dharna or dharnā A traditional form of 'sit-down' strike

dhṛti Support or sustenance

dhyāna Profound and abstract spiritual meditation that gives rise to *samādhi* (also one of the 'eight limbs' of yoga)

duḥkha (in sanskrit) or Dukkha (Pāli) Pain, suffering, misery, unhappiness

dvija or dwija Twice born; appellation of the upper castes of Hindu society whose initiation is considered a second birth

dussera Dussehra or Vijaya Dashami is a Hindu festival that celebrates the victory of good over evil

***hatha* or *āsana* yoga** Physical exercises associated with the yoga system of Indian philosophy

Īśvara The Lord God

jīvanmukti Liberation while still being alive

kaivalya Isolation liberation; state in which the *puruṣa's* own nature has been isolated from material life; ultimate aim of yoga

karma Law of ethical causality; action

khadi/khaddar Hand-spun cloth

Linga Śarīra The subtle body

mantra/mantram Prayers or formulas given in the scriptural texts; Tagore often used it to signify an unreasoned creed

Maya or Māyā A term found in Pali and Sanskrit literature, has multiple meanings and can be translated to mean ignorance or more specifically an "illusion"

mokṣa Liberation

mukti Freedom or salvation as the ultimate end of life

nāstika In Indian philosophy refers to any heterodox school of thought, defined as one that does not accept the authority of the Vedas (sacred scriptures of ancient India)

niyama Observance (one of the 'eight limbs' of yoga)

phronesis A classical Greek word. It was used by Aristotle and is usually taken to mean prudence or practical wisdom

pleonexia Extreme greed for wealth or material possessions; avariceor the desire to have what rightfully belongs to others; wanting more than one's share or acquisitiveness as such

prajñā 'Truth-bearing' insight or wisdom. It refers to an insight into the true nature of reality

prakṛti Nature

prāṇāyāma Control of breath (one of the 'eight limbs' of yoga)

pratyāhāra Withdrawal of the senses from their objects (one of the 'eight limbs' of yoga)

puri Wheat or flour cakes fried in oil

puruṣa Person, self or consciousness

Ram Rajya Kingdom or rule of Ram

Ramanama The Divine name. Mahatma Gandhi thought that repeating the Divine name was the infallible remedy for all life's ills

rashtra Nation

ṛta Vedic law of the world (moral and cosmic)

Sādhanā* or *Sādhana Means to self-knowledge

samādhi Liberating state of absorption, which consists in a gravitation towards deep discrimination between the self and Nature, and the experience of the annihilation of *saṃskāra*s (one of the 'eight limbs' of yoga)

saṃskāra Psychological disposition/tendency-impression; the subconscious result of reactions and actions to past experiences

saṃyoga saṃyoga-conjunction, contact. The word is used in the Sāṅkhya Yoga to indicate the tying of a person/puruṣa to nature/prakṛt

Sāṁkhya, or Sāṅkhya Name of an orthodox system of Indian philosophy

santāna Child

sannyāsa The last stage in the Hindu life cycle

sat Absolute reality

satya Truth; reality

satyagraha Firmness in adhering to the truth

Shudra The fourth and lowest caste of the four *varna*s, or social classes, in Hindu society

śramaṇa Lit., to toil or to take on difficulties; ancient tradition of Indian philosophy associated with a tireless search for freedom through personal effort and means

sūtra Ancient sacred aphorism

svādhyāya A term that ambiguously stands for the study of the Vedas, and the study of the self

swa Commonly translated as 'self'/or broadly 'to do with the self'

swabhavik Natural, or of one's own orientation

swadeshi Pertaining to one's own country

swaraj Self-rule; self-government

syādvāda or syadvada The Jain doctrine of conditioned predication

tapas From the root '*tapa*', which means, among other things, to cause heat, pain, discomfort

tapasvi Ascetic; one who has accumulated much merit through self-mortification

tapasya Austerity, penance, focusing of energy and self-purification

telos An ultimate object or aim; end/goal of life

varna The ideal unit of a functionally divided Hindu society

varnashramadharma Duties performed according to the system of four varnas (four-fold hierarchical division of Hindu society) and four ashrams (stages in life)

vrata Vow

yajña Sacrifice

yama Rule of moral conduct (one of the 'eight limbs' of yoga)

yogi A male ascetic

zamindari The Zamindari System was introduced by Cornwallis in 1793 through the Permanent Settlement Act. As per this act, rajas and taluqdars were recognized as zamindars. The zamindars were supposed to collect the land revenue from the peasants

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