

# **Cinematic and Iconographic Imagery of Gandhi and Public Sphere in**

**India:**

## **Some Appreciations, Some Depreciations**

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*The text and sub-text of contemporary nation-building programme in India and the institutionalised nationalism that it weaves is strongly anchored on ‘the cinematic and iconographic representation’ of M.K. Gandhi. Media, films in parts, conveys or reaffirms reality, and plays a crucial role in the reproduction of the same and become visual texts embedded with messages. People’s perception of media content influences the way they understand the world and react to other people. Media largely remains a symbolic representation of power and its contesting strands in a given society. The paper first looks at the cinematic representations of Gandhi from the 1950s to 2000s and unearths the variations within the same and contrast them with Gandhian world visions. Second, the paper attempts to locate Gandhi in the Statist enterprise and in the popular imagery and construe the realities of the public sphere in India. The paper observes that in this politics of representation, vocality and audibility, media has realised the weight and effect of keeping alive the image of Gandhi in the minds of the ‘aam aadmi’ (large masses/common man) in India. Consequently media, namely print, television, cinema and the ‘new media’ (internet and the virtual spaces, and also cell/mobile communications) have systematically spun and re-spun and celebrated the image of Gandhi both as ‘Mahatma’ and as ‘Bapu’.*

**Keywords: Cinematic, Iconographic, Imagery, Gandhi, Public Sphere**

*I have nothing new to teach the world*

*Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills* (M. K. Gandhi) (Kriplani, (Ed.) 1958).

## **1. Gandhian World-Visions In Media**

The text and sub-text of contemporary nation-building programme in India and the institutionalised nationalism that it weaves (Parekh, 1989; Rothermund, in Rothermund, 2006: 53-101) is strongly anchored on ‘the cinematic and iconographic representation’ Viridi, 2003: 1-25; 26-59) of M.K. Gandhi. Gandhi both as a ‘Mahatma’ and as ‘Bapu’ continues to intrigue, amuse and bemuse the people in the sub-continent and the world at large (Parekh, 2001; Mukherjee, (Ed.) 1993; Prabhu, & Rao, 1945 (1967); Carter, 1995; Scharff, 2008; Hatt, 2002; Dalton, 1996; Byrne, 1984. 1988). Media, films in parts, conveys or reaffirms reality, and plays a crucial role in the reproduction of the same and become visual texts embedded with messages. People’s perception of media content influences the way they understand the world and react to other people (Shrum, in Bryant, & Oliver, (Ed.) 1994: 50-73). Media largely remains a symbolic representation of power and its contesting strands in a given society (James & Michael (Ed.) 1991; Fairclough, 1995; Folkerts, & Lacy, 2004; Rose, (2007; Wilson, (Ed.) 1982; Goodwin, & Whannel, (Ed.) 1992). In this politics of representation, vocality and audibility, media has realised the weight and effect of keeping alive the image of Gandhi in the minds of the ‘*aam aadmi*’ (large masses/common man) in India. Consequently media namely print, television (Wober, & Gunter, 1988), cinema and the ‘new media’ (internet and the virtual spaces, and also cell/mobile communications) (Castells, 2000) have systematically spun and re-spun the image of Gandhi both as ‘Mahatma’ and as ‘Bapu’.

Cinematic representations of Gandhi over the years have fed the public with multiple images of a ‘Saint’, ‘A Father figure’ (both at the public and the private), an overarching leader, a failed father and a person held responsible for the unwelcome partition of the sub-continent and the perils that followed and demonised Gandhi for Muslim appeasement etc. For instance, Richard Attenborough’s ‘*Gandhi: His Triumph Changed The World Forever*’ (Attenborough, 1982; Fischer, 1951 (1982); Grenier, 1983) narrates the evolution of M.K Gandhi from ‘Mahatma’ to ‘Bapu’. Contrastingly Feroz Abbas Khan’s ‘*Gandhi, My Father*’ (Khan, 2007) explores and unravels the intricate, complex, and strained relationship between Mahatma Gandhi and his eldest son Harilal Gandhi. While the former cinematic representation celebrates Gandhi in the spirit of the Indian National Congress eulogizing Gandhi as the uncontested ‘Father of the nation’, the latter narrates the story of a ‘Father that he (Gandhi) was not’ (Dalal, 2007; Joshi, 2007).

Interestingly underneath all these cinematic and popular images there is a coherent thread strongly substantiating patriarchal norms and further rooting the same as something unchallengeable and sacrosanct. In other words, Gandhi is the unquestioned final ‘Father figure of India’ and there is a strong lamenting, nostalgia associated with his assassination (Barua, 2005). The phase from the 1940s through 1980s in Bollywood is replete with instances of movies churning the imagery of Gandhi as the sole factor singlehandedly sketching and channelizing the freedom struggle in India. For instance, the soundtrack ‘*De Di Hamein Aazaadi bina khadag bina dhal. Sabarmati ke santh tu ne kardiya kamal*’<sup>1</sup> from Satyen Bose directed film titled *Jagriti* (The Awakening) (Bose, 1954) conveys popular

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<sup>1</sup> Bhonsle, Asha (1954). ‘*Sabarmati ke santh tu ne kardiya kamal*’. Lyrics: Kavi Pradeep Ramchandra Baryanji Dwivedi. Music: Hemanta Kumar Mukhopadhyay. Soundtrack in Bose, Satyen, dir. (1954). *Jagriti*. India: Filmistan/Ultra Video/Sasdhara Mukherjee Productions.

imagery of Gandhi as ‘Mahatma’ and ‘Bapu’ who scripted and singly directionalised the course of the Indian national movement and sacrificed his life for the nation.

### ***De Di Hamein Aazaadi (Gave Us Freedom/Liberation)<sup>2</sup>***

*De di hamein aazaadi bina khadag bina dhaal* (Gave us freedom/liberation without swords and shields)  
*Saabaramati ke sant toone kar diya kamaal* (Saint of Sabarmati you have done a miracle)  
(Chorus) *De di hamein aazaadi bina khadag bina dhaal* (Gave us freedom/liberation without swords and shields)  
*Saabaramati ke sant toone kar diya kamaal* (Saint of Sabarmati you have done a miracle)  
*Aandhi mein bhi jalati rahi gaandhi teri mashaal* (Your fame stands through the tempest)  
(Chorus) *Saabaramati ke sant tuune kar diya kamaal* (Saint of Sabarmati you have done a miracle)  
*De di hamein aazaadi bina khadag bina dhaal* (Gave us freedom/liberation without swords and shields)  
*Saabaramati ke sant toone kar diya kamaal* (Saint of Sabarmati you have done a miracle)  
*Dharati pe ladi toone, ajab dhang ki ladaai* (Strange were your tactics of non-violent fight)  
*Daagi na kaheen top, na bandook chalaai* (No tanks, no guns)  
*Dushman ke kile par bhi, na ki tuune chadhaai* (nor did you attack the forts of the enemies)  
*Vaah re fakeer khoob karaamaat dikhaai* (Oh Fakir what a display of craft)  
*Chutaki mein dushmanon ko diya desh se nikaal* (you ousted the enemies with ease)  
(Chorus) *Saabaramati ke sant tuune kar diya kamaal* (Saint of Sabarmati you have done a miracle)  
*De di hamein aazaadi bina khadag bina dhaal* (Gave us freedom/liberation without swords and shields)  
*Saabaramati ke sant toone kar diya kamaal* (Saint of Sabarmati you have done a miracle)  
(Chorus) *Raghupati raaghav raaja raam<sup>3</sup>* (Chief of the house of Raghu, Lord Rama)  
*Shataranj bichha kar yahaan, baitha tha zamaana* (A game of chess was on

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<sup>2</sup> All loose translations mine.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram’ (sometimes called ‘Ram Dhun’) is a popular *bhajan* (Hindu devotional song) that was a favorite of Mahatma Gandhi. The version that is most common was put to music by Vishnu Digambar Paluskar, and was sung by Gandhi and his followers as they walked during the 241 mile Salt march to Dandi on 12 March 1930.

and the world a spectator)  
*Lagata tha ki mushkil hai, firangi ko haraana* (It seemed impossible to defeat  
the enemy)  
*Takkar thi bade zor ki, dushman bhi tha taana* (The game was tough and the  
enemy resilient)  
*Par tu bhi tha baapu, bada ustaad puraana* (But you proved that you were a  
grandmaster)  
*Maara vo kas ke daav, ke ulati sabhi ki chaal* (You made a strategic move and  
turned the tables)  
*(Chorus) Saabaramati ke sant tuune kar diya kamaal* (Saint of Sabarmati you  
have done a miracle)  
*De di hamein aazaadi bina khadag bina dhaal* (Gave us freedom/liberation  
without swords and shields)  
*Saabaramati ke sant toone kar diya kamaal* (Saint of Sabarmati you have done  
a miracle)  
*(Chorus) Raghupati raaghav raaja raam* (Chief of the house of Raghu,  
Lord Rama)  
*Jab jab tera bigul baja, javaan chal pade* (Each time you played the bugle,  
soldiers marched to your tunes )  
*Mazadoor chal pade the, aur kisaan chal pade* (Workers and peasants  
marched)  
*Hindu woh musalamaan, sikh pathaan chal pade* (Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs,  
Pathans marched)  
*Kadamon mein teri, koti koti praan chal pade* (Millions followed your  
footsteps)  
*Phoolon ki sej chhod ke, daude jawahar laal* (Jawaharlal abandoned his life of  
luxury and followed your steps)  
*(Chorus) Saabaramati ke sant tuune kar diya kamaal* (Saint of Sabarmati you  
have done a miracle)  
*De di hamein aazaadi bina khadag bina dhaal* (Gave us freedom/liberation  
without swords and shields)  
*Saabaramati ke sant toone kar diya kamaal* (Saint of Sabarmati you have done  
a miracle)  
*(Chorus) Raghupati raaghav raaja raam* (Chief of the house of Raghu,  
Lord Rama)  
*Mann mein thi ahinsa ki lagan, tan pe langoti* (With Ahimsa in your heart and  
a loin cloth around)  
*Laakhon mein ghoomata tha, liye satya ki sonti* (You travelled around  
preaching the power of truth)  
*Waise to dekhane mein thi, hasti teri chhoti* (Your appearance looked  
vulnerable)  
*Lekin tujhe zhukti thi, himalaya ki bhi choti* (But you were respected by the  
world, the high and the mighty himalayas)  
*Duniya mein bhi baapu tu, tha insaan bemisaal* (You were a person  
incomparable)  
*(Chorus) Saabaramati ke sant tuune kar diya kamaal* (Saint of Sabarmati you  
have done a miracle)  
*De di hamein aazaadi bina khadag bina dhaal* (Gave us freedom/liberation  
without swords and shields)

*Saabaramati ke sant toone kar diya kamaal* (Saint of Sabarmati you have done a miracle)  
 (Chorus) *Raghupati raaghav raaja raam* (Chief of the house of Raghu, Lord Rama)  
*Jag mein jiya hai koi, toh baapu tu hi jiya* (You lived your life to the full)  
*Tuune vatan ki raah mein sab kuch luta diya* (And laid your life for the cause of the nation)  
*Maanga na koi takht na koi taaj bhi liya* (You desired no name, fame, power, or glory)  
*Amrit diya sabhi ko, magar khud zahar piya* (You gave us peace and bore the brunt of fury)  
*Jis din teri chita jali, roya tha mahaakaal* (Heavens cried on your funeral pyre)  
 (Chorus) *Saabaramati ke sant tuune kar diya kamaal* (Saint of Sabarmati you have done a miracle)  
*De di hamein aazaadi bina khadag bina dhaal* (Gave us freedom/liberation without swords and shields)  
*Saabaramati ke sant tuune kar diya kamaal* (Saint of Sabarmati you have done a miracle)  
 (Chorus) *Raghupati raaghav raaja raam* (Chief of the house of Raghu, Lord Rama)  
*Raghupati raaghav raaja raam* (Chief of the house of Raghu, Lord Rama)  
*Raghupati raaghav raaja raam* (Chief of the house of Raghu, Lord Rama)

Post 2000 Gandhi has become a topical issue for Bollywood movies. Genera of movies have been put on display celebrating, re-reading, re-locating, critiquing Gandhi and his world-visions and their relevance in contemporary times in India. For instance, the popular soundtrack '*Bande mein tha dum*'<sup>4</sup> from Rajkumar Hirani directed *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* (Carry on Munna Bhai) (Hirani, 2006) describes in praise the qualities of Gandhi and laments his absence in everyday life in contemporary India.

### ***Bande Mein Tha Dum (The Man Had The Courage)***<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Nigam, Sonu, Ghoshal, Shreya, and Biswas, Pranab (2006). '*Bande mein tha dum*'. Lyrics: Swanand Kirkire. Music: Shantanu Moitra. Soundtrack in Hirani, Rajkumar, dir. (2006). *Lage Raho Munna Bhai*. India: Vidhu Vindo Chopra/Vindo Chopra Productions.

<sup>5</sup> The song is set to the tune of Dwivedi, Kavi Pradeep Ramchandra Baryanji (1954). '*Aao Bacchon tumhe dikhayeh Jhaki Hindustan Ki*'. Lyrics: Kavi Pradeep Ramchandra Baryanji Dwivedi. Music: Hemanta Kumar Mukhopadhyay. Soundtrack in Bose, Satyen, dir. (1954). *Jagriti*. India: Filmistan/Ultra Video/Sasdhar Mukherjee Productions. (All loose translations mine).

*ho aaja re.. (Oh come back)*  
*ho aaja re.. (Oh Come back)*  
*maati pukaare tujhe desh pukaare (The nation yearns for you)*  
*aaja re ab aaja re (Come back now)*  
*bhoolle hum raahen (We have lost our ways)*  
*hamen raah dikha de (Guide us, show us the way)*  
*aaja re raah dikha de (Come and guide us)*  
*ainak pehne laathi pakde (Bespectacled and with a walking stick)*  
*chalte the wo shaan se (He(Gandhi) used to walk with glory)*  
*zaalim kaanpe thar thar thar thar, sun kar un ka naam re (The cruellest of the*  
*enemy would tremble on hearing his name)*  
*ho ho.. (ho..ho)*  
*kad tha un ka chhota sa aur sarpat un ki chaal re (a little man with a robust*  
*stride)*  
*duble se patle se the wo chalte seena taan ke (lean and thin he used to walk*  
*fearlessly)*  
*(Chorus) bande mein tha dum (The man had the courage)*  
*Vande Matram<sup>6</sup> (Mother, I Bow to Thee)<sup>7</sup>*  
*bande mein tha dum (The man had the courage)*  
*Vande Matram (Mother, I Bow to Thee)*  
*bande mein tha dum (The man had the courage)*  
*Vande Matram (Mother, I Bow to Thee)*  
*bande mein tha dum (The man had the courage)*  
*Vande Matram (Mother, I Bow to Thee)*  
*Vande Matram (Mother, I Bow to Thee)*  
*Vande Matram (Mother, I Bow to Thee).*  
*ho bhai bhai ka dushman hai bana re, nafrat ki aandhi behti re (brothers have*  
*turned enemies, there is a tempest of hatred everywhere)*  
*vehshi dilon ko baapu pyaar sikha de (Bapu give these cruel hearts a lesson of*  
*love)*  
*aaja re baapu aaja re (Come, Bapu come)*  
*(Chorus) bande mein tha dum (The man had the courage)*  
*Vande Matram (Mother, I Bow to Thee)*  
*bande mein tha dum (The man had the courage)*  
*Vande Matram (Mother, I Bow to Thee)*  
*ho jhooth ka badhta jaaye raaj (Come, Bapu come)*  
*o baapu.. (Oh Bapu)*  
*Apne hi ho gaye dhokhebaaz (We have deceived one another)*

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<sup>6</sup> 'Vande Mataram' (I bow to thee, Mother) is a poem from the famed novel *Anandamath* which was written by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay in 1882. Written in Bengali and Sanskrit 'Vande Mataram' is a hymn to Goddess Durga, identified as the national personification of India. 'Vande Mataram' became the clarion call among the nationalist during the Indian independence movement. It assumed political significance when it was sung by Rabindranath Tagore in 1896 at the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress. In 1950 the first two verses of the poem were given the official status of the 'national song' of India, distinct from the national anthem of India '*Jana Gana Mana*'.

<sup>7</sup> Sri Aurobindo Ghose translated 'Vande Mataram' into a verse as 'Mother, I Bow to Thee' (*Karmayogin*, 20 November, 1909). I use Aurobindo's translation for this paper knowing fully the difficulties and challenges of translations from one language to another especially from native Indian languages to English.

*aaj hamen apno se bachaane* (Come Bapu and save us from one another)  
*aaja re baapu mere* (Come, Bapu come)  
*(Chorus) bande mein tha dum* (The man had the courage)  
*Vande Matram* (Mother, I Bow to Thee)  
*bande mein tha dum* (The man had the courage)  
*Vande Matram* (Mother, I Bow to Thee)  
*Vande Matram* (Mother, I Bow to Thee)  
*paai paai mein insaan bika re* (we are gullible and overpowered by money  
power)  
*jaan ye ho gayi sasti re* (human life has little worth)  
*soya zameer baapu* (Bapu come and awaken our sleeping conscience)  
*phir se jaga de* (come and wake us)  
*aaja re baapu mere* (Come, Bapu come)  
*(Chorus) Vande Matram..*  
*Vande Matram* (Mother, I Bow to Thee)  
*Vande Matram* (Mother, I Bow to Thee)  
*Vande Matram* (Mother, I Bow to Thee)  
*bande mein tha dum* (The man had the courage)  
*Vande Matram* (Mother, I Bow to Thee)  
*bande mein tha dum* (The man had the courage)  
*Vande Matram* (Mother, I Bow to Thee)  
*bande mein tha dum* (The man had the courage)  
*Vande Matram* (Mother, I Bow to Thee)  
*bande mein tha dum* (The man had the courage)  
*Vande Matram* (Mother, I Bow to Thee)

Construing the two lyrics one from the 50s and the other from 2000s one can clearly unearth the changes in the popular imagery. While the former eulogised and gave patriotic rhetoric to Gandhi, the latter seems to look at Gandhi with awe and aspiration and historicising Gandhi as a ‘Mahatma’ and as a ‘Bapu’ all at the same time and constantly getting bemused by the enigmatic persona of Gandhi. The theme of the latter also conveys an urgency to bring back Gandhi in practice in contemporary times in India with the purpose to even out the rough edges of the contentious problems associated with the functioning of democracy in post-independence times including corruption, communalism, etc.

Strangely enough Gandhi himself during his life time refused to accept the popular images projected by his followers, admirers and critics (*Young India*, 1927). Both iconic and cinematic representations of Gandhi, anchors strongly on his much pronounced notions of

‘non-violence’ (*Ahimsa*). ‘Non-violence’ in short is considered to be the ‘mool-mantra’ of ‘Gandhian World-visions’ (Kriplani, (Ed.) 1958: 85-107; Bilgrami, 2002: 79-93; Parekh, 2001: 92-110; Erickson, 1969; Dalton, 1998). Gandhi justified his *Satyagraha* through the *Gita* (Kriplani, (Ed.) 1958: 56-80; Parekh, 2001: 35-48, 64-77; Mishra, 2008: 15-23) and interpreted the *Gita* to arrive towards his principles of non-violence, love, interconnectedness, duty and sacrifice, where self and other are intimately connected. Through this creative act of interpretation, Gandhi successfully transformed the *Gita* into the catalyst and cornerstone of non-violent political action against British imperialism (Soni, 2004; Gandhi, 1910 (1938)). However, Gandhi used the battlefield which forms the backdrop of the narrative of the *Gita* only as a metaphor for the struggle against evil and strongly voiced his concern over the violent connotations in the *Gita*. Gandhi’s allegorical commentary allowed him to downplay the prominent role of violence that is unavoidable in a literal reading, thereby empowering him to promote his own antithetical agenda of non-violence (*Ahimsa*) (Sharpe, 1985:118; Green, (Ed.). 1987: 72). Gandhi skilfully embraced non-violent non-cooperation as the ultimate method of fighting oppression and channelizing democracy in a given society (Kriplani, (Ed.) 1958: 138-150). Non-violence sought to end the cycle of hatred and destruction while non-cooperation sought to dismantle unjust colonial institutions (Kriplani, (Ed.) 1958: 81-84). Gandhi argued that non-violent non-cooperation was not a passive manner of requesting social justice, but the most effective method of demanding it (Walton Jr., (1967); Soni, 2004; Gandhi, 1910 (1938): 55-59).

## 2. Locating Gandhi In The Statist Enterprise And In The Popular Imagery:

### Construing Ground Realities

The spectre of Gandhi looms large over the nationalist projection of the Indian state. Here in it becomes essential to interrogate and locate Gandhi and his spectre in the nation-building programme in India (Raghuramraju, (Ed.). 2006; Rudolph, & Rudolph, 2006; Lal, 2008: 4-11). Gandhi's spectre seems to be enveloping the entire horizon so overwhelmingly that a simple question 'Where do you not find Gandhi?' requires endless brainstorming. Gandhi seems to be omnipresent from currency, to posters, to picture frames in offices both Government and non-Government, Bollywood movies, nationalist songs, naming of streets and roads<sup>8</sup>, text books in schools<sup>9</sup>, textile (*Khadi*)<sup>10</sup>, social movements<sup>11</sup>, movements for smaller states<sup>12</sup> etc. just to name a few instances. Interestingly even a simple pictorial reference to Gandhi changes the course and futures of social movements in India. For instance, on the first day of Anna Hazare's first phase of fast in Jantar Mantar, New Delhi in the month of April 2011 a Muslim leader objected mildly to the huge picture of '*Bharat*

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<sup>8</sup> Almost every town, city or settlement has a road named after the father of the nation. It would be very rare to locate a settlement or a township in India not having road names as M.G Marg, Mahatma Gandhi Road etc.

<sup>9</sup> For instance see the section on Gandhi's Talisman quoted in the opening pages of school books used for study materials by the NCERT or CBSE, New Delhi.

<sup>10</sup> *Khadi* has been identified with Gandhi and is considered to be close to Gandhi's visions of an empowered self sustained village based cottage economy. I would like to bring forth the idea that the 'home-spun-ness' (*Sawdeshi*-ness) of the textile and the manual labour that it involves makes *Khadi* a textile not just of self empowerment but also 'national pride'. It is interesting to note that *Khadi* has become commercialized and become a trump card for the *udyogpati/punjipati* or capitalist enterprise in post colonial nation building programme in India.

<sup>11</sup> Social movements led by activists like Medha Patkar, Sundarlal Bahugana, Baba Amte, Anna Hazare just to name a few can be conveniently clubbed under the category of movements that ostensibly claim to be Gandhian or moved by Gandhian methods.

<sup>12</sup> Regional parties demanding smaller states have been time and again invoking the name of Gandhi to justify their demands. For instance, the second generation Gorkhaland movement spearheaded by Gorkha Jana Mukti Morcha (GJMM) under the aegis of Bimal Gurung demanding the creation of a separate state of Gorkhaland by incorporating areas in and around Darjeeling has since 2007 declared itself to be Gandhian movement. The token lip-service given to Gandhi has made it more acceptable by the public and earned political credits.

*Mata*' (Iconography of Mother India loosely drawn from the Hindu Goddess *Durga*<sup>13</sup>) placed as a centrepiece and mentioned that the movement seemed to be inclined towards the rightwing Hindu *fundamentalist*<sup>14</sup>-*nationalist* faction, the RSS (*Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh*) (Andersen, & Damle, 1987; Jaffrelot, 1998; Jaffrelot, 2007). The organisers of the Anna Hazare movement immediately replaced the controversial picture of '*Bharat Mata*' with that of a picture of Mahatma Gandhi (Pandita, & Gandhi, 2011: 20-23). In short, Gandhi has become a convenient and effective consensus building icon in post colonial India, 'a brand in itself', attractive merchandise with an ever-ready market.

On a similar note 'Gandhi' in contemporary times in India comes in variational degrees ranging from staunch Gandhities with Gandhi caps, moderate Gandhites, affectionate Gandhites, inclined Gandhites, the Congress version of Gandhi, the BJP version Gandhi, pseudo- Gandhites, Gandhi of the rich, Gandhi of the poor, Gandhi of India, Gandhi of Bharat and many other varieties. Interestingly what comes out very strongly in all the hues of 'Gandhi' that is projected publicly and made visible in contemporary times in India is that a token lip-service to 'Gandhi' seem to authenticate the ambivalent and contested polar interests/divergent claims. In short, having a mere pictorial reference to 'Gandhi' or just mentioning '*Gandhi ne bola tha...*' ('Gandhi had said...') is a case sufficient enough to attract the attention of the large masses or the state itself or command over the target audience.

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<sup>13</sup> See, Sarkar, Tanika (1987): Nationalist Iconography: Image of Women In 19<sup>th</sup> Century Literature. *Economic & Political Weekly*. November 21- 27: 2011-2015.

<sup>14</sup> I use the term 'fundamentalist' with much caution knowing well the contests and contentions within the same. See, Herriot, Peter (2009). *Religious Fundamentalism: Global, Local and Personal*. London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group; Also see, Haynes, Jeffrey (2009). Chapter 11, "Religious Fundamentalisms"; Madeley, John (2009). Chapter 12, "Religious And The State"; Mohseni, Payam & Wilcox, Clyde (2009). Chapter 14, "Religion And Political Parties", and David Herbert. (2009). Chapter 15, "Religion And Civil Society", in Haynes, Jeffrey (Ed.). (2009). *Routledge Handbook Of Religion And Politics*. London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 159-173, 174-191, 211-235, 231-245.

‘Gandhigiri’, the much in vogue popular imagery of Gandhi serves as an interesting reference point in this discussion of Gandhi’s world views and its relevance in contemporary times in India (Sitapati, 2011: 39-44; Mohanty, 2011: 16-19). The ‘Munnabhai’ (Hirani, 2006) sequels outlining ‘Gandhigiri’ had the audience applauding the cine-star Sanjay Dutt re-inventing Gandhi and his methods of ‘*Satyagraha*’ and ‘*Ahimsa*’ in Bollywood style (Ghosh, & Babu, 2006: 5225-5227) to suit the sensibilities of the large masses chocked by the immediate hurdles of a nation in the making ranging from corruption, to nepotism, to reservation, to caste etc. just to name a few. “Gandhi, the man, was once the message. In post-liberalisation India, “Gandhigiri” is the message” (Ghosh, & Babu, 2006).

It is interesting to have a re-look at the word /term ‘Gandhigiri’ because in ordinary parlance we often use hindi terms such as ‘Goondagiri’, ‘Dadagiri’ (also ‘Didigiri’) to refer to brutish force or tactics employed by goons, anti-socials, thugs and cons etc. And here we are served with a new term ‘Gandhigiri’ with the suffix ‘giri’. An act denoting Gandhian methods stylized in Bollywood and served to the audience through the medium of films which claim to re-invent the teachings of Gandhi with reference to temporal and spatial needs of contemporary India. For instance, to lie or to use unfair means for a good/noble cause is considered to be an equivalent to ‘a thousand truths’. Similarly acts stylized on ‘Robinhood’ i.e. robbing the rich and distributing the booty to the poor is also seen as pious and noble and, therefore, Gandhian in tone. However, what goes a miss in these popular readings and imagery via Bollywood is that Gandhian notions of ‘means and ends’ gets brutally smashed little do we realise that the means was as sacrosanct for Gandhi as the ends (Kriplani, (Ed.) 1958: 81-84; Audi, (Ed.) 1995 (1999); Bondurant, 1958; Dhawan, 1951; Gandhi, 1958; Gandhi, 1951 (1961); Iyer, 1973; Woodcock, 1971; Sheldon, 2001: 119-120).

Coming to the issue of 'Violence' and 'Non-Violence' two themes of the 'Gandhian world-visions' in contemporary times in India one needs to confess that 'Violence' and 'Non-Violence' are interwoven and situated in a complex web of spatial and temporal social realities. The dynamics of the two is not just difficult to grasp but also challenging to glean. Posed with an array of ideological juxtapositions and definitional ambiguity both terms remain difficult concepts to delineate into easy theoretically coherent arguments. 'Nonviolence' i.e., the renunciation of violence in personal, social, or international affairs often includes a commitment (called active nonviolence or nonviolent direct action) actively to oppose violence (and usually evil or injustice as well) by nonviolent means. Nonviolence may renounce physical violence alone or both physical and psychological violence (Audi, (Ed.). 1995 (1999)). It may represent a purely personal commitment or be intended to be normative for others as well. When unconditional, '*absolute nonviolence*' renounces violence in all actual and hypothetical circumstances. When conditional, '*conditional nonviolence*' concedes the justifiability of violence in hypothetical circumstances but denies it in practice. Held on moral grounds (*principled nonviolence*), the commitment belongs to an ethics of conduct or an ethics of virtue. If the former, it will likely be expressed as a moral rule or principle (e.g., One ought always to act non-violently) to guide action. If the latter, it will urge cultivating the traits and dispositions of a nonviolent character (which presumably then will be expressed in nonviolent action). As a principle, nonviolence may be considered either basic or derivative. Either way, its justification will be either utilitarian or deontological. Held on non-moral grounds (*pragmatic nonviolence*), nonviolence is a means to specific social, political, economic, or other ends, themselves held on non-moral grounds. Its justification lies in its effectiveness for these limited purposes rather than as a way of life or a guide to conduct in general. An alternative source of power, it may then be used in the service of evil as well as good. Nonviolent social action, whether of a principled or pragmatic sort, may

include noncooperation, mass demonstrations, marches, strikes, boycotts, and civil disobedience. Undertaken in defence of an entire nation or state, nonviolence provides an alternative to war. It seeks to deny an invading or occupying force the capacity to attain its objectives by withholding the cooperation of the populace needed for effective rule and by nonviolent direct action, including civil disobedience. It may also be used against oppressive domestic rule or on behalf of social justice (Audi, (Ed.). 1995 (1999); Bondurant, 1958; Dhawan, 1951; Gandhi, 1958; Gandhi, 1951 (1961); Iyer, 1973; Woodcock, 1971; Sheldon, 2001: 119-120).

Drawing parallel with the recent wave of Gandhian movements seeking to unleash a wave of *Satyagraha* against institutionalised corruption and nepotism in India we find a strong flow towards Gandhian world-visions. Both the Anna Hazare<sup>15</sup> and also the Baba Ramdev<sup>16</sup> movements have triggered a series of '*chintan*' (introspection) and brainstorming across the

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<sup>15</sup> Kisan Baburao Hazare popularly known 'Anna Hazare' is a retired driver of the Indian Army. Hazare is a social activist based in Ralegan Siddhi, a village in Parner taluka of Ahmednagar district, Maharashtra, India. He was awarded the Padma Bhushan—the third-highest civilian award—by the Government of India in 1992 for his efforts in establishing Ralegan Siddhi as a model village. In 2011, Hazare initiated a Satyagraha movement for passing a stronger anti-corruption Lokpal (ombudsman) bill in the Indian Parliament as conceived in the 'Jan Lokpal Bill' (People's Ombudsman Bill). This draft bill incorporated more stringent provisions and wider power to the *Lokpal* (Ombudsman) than the draft Lokpal bill prepared by the government in 2010. These include placing 'the Prime Minister within the ambit of the proposed lokpal's powers'. Hazare began his Indefinite Fast on 5 April 2011 at Jantar Mantar in Delhi to press for the demand to form a joint committee of the representatives of the Government and the civil society to draft a stronger anti-corruption bill with stronger penal actions and more independence to the *Lokpal* and *Lokayuktas* (Ombudsmen in the states), after his demand was rejected by the Prime Minister of India Manmohan Singh.

<sup>16</sup> Swami Ramdev founder of 'Patanjali Yog Peeth', Haridwar, has been associated with the '2011 Indian anti-corruption movement' and was actively involved in the 'Jan Lokpal agitation'. On 27 February 2011 Baba Ramdev held a large rally of over 1 lakh people at the Ramlila Maidan, New Delhi to protest against corruption. Those present at the rally included Baba Ramdev, Acharya Balkrishna, Ram Jethmalani, Anna Hazare, Arvind Kejriwal, Kiran Bedi, Swami Agnivesh and many others. All members spoke and explained how corruption was rampant in the country and how the government itself was indulging in it. The most highlighted topic was Indian black money lying in tax havens of Switzerland. Baba Ramdev launched the '*Bhrashtachar Mitao Satyagraha*' which was held at Ramlila Maidan, New Delhi on 4 June 2011. Baba Ramdev declared to go on an *Anshan* (indefinite fast) on June 4, 2011 at Ramlila Ground Delhi to pressure the Central Government to root out corruption from India and bring back the black money stashed away in various financial institutions abroad. After this declaration the government was said to have set up a panel to suggest steps to curb black money and its transfer abroad, in an apparent bid to placate Ramdev. See, 'Baba Ramdev Fast Against Corruption- Indiaecho.com'. [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) (accessed on 27.10.2011); NDTV Correspondent. (2011). *Baba Ramdev hospitalised given glucose, continues fast*. Haridwar, NDTV 11 June 2011. [www.ndtv.com](http://www.ndtv.com) (accessed on 27.10.2011).

length and breadth of India seeking to locate Gandhi anew or at least discover or find a ‘new Gandhi’ to save India during times of crisis and turmoil (Pandita, & Gandhi, 2011; Pal, 2011: 24-27). Media has craftily scripted and directionalised the popular images and synchronised the chords of similarity between Anna and Gandhi. ‘Beyond TV bytes and debates, there is a large media strategy to project Anna Hazare as Mahatma Gandhi. From *bhajans* (Hindu devotional songs) sung to Gandhi caps, everything is well planned in strict accordance with this strategy’ (Pandita, & Gandhi: 2011). Media has in a way successfully fed the popular image projecting Anna as ‘*Aaj ka Gandhi*’ (Today’s Gandhi).

Both movements have resorted to titillate popular sentiments and arouse the passions and power of the youths who for very long time have remained largely disgruntled with the system. The message transported to the large audience post Bollywood movies like ‘*Rang de Basanti*’ (Colour Me Orange) (Mehra, 2006) has been that the youths need to take charge and change the system and set India free from octogenarian leaderships who have maintained corruptions and nepotisms. *Rang De Basanti* or RDB not only induced the public into organizing candle-light vigilantism throughout the public spaces in urban India and public protests on various issues of public interest but also motivated the youth to participate in politics (Habermas:1962 (1987)). RDB churned much debate at various levels for its portrayal of nationalism and citizenship especially amongst the young audiences. The desire to bring about a change or make a difference in society manifested itself in an exhibitionist mode of actively participating in street protests and lobby on various public interests. This youth activism not just helped revitalize citizenship and expand the scope and direction of

*public sphere*<sup>17</sup> in India but also demonstrated the grip that Bollywood has over the masses in India.

However, these popular social movements which have relied heavily on media (old and new) and ‘youth power’, ‘youth networks’, though very vibrant and mobile have failed to follow the Gandhian footsteps and have instead zoomed to spontaneous mob-frenzy and exhibition or outburst of violence. The following transcripts of a report on Anna Hazare’s movement in Ramlila Maidan, New Delhi by Jay Mazoomdaar strips bare the bones and the flesh of the Team Anna movement and the Youth activism it claims to re-generate post JP Movement of the 1970s and also the outburst or ‘displacement of anger’ among the activist citizenry:

There is strength in numbers and numbers add easily at the Ramlila ground. A sizeable anti-Congress, pro-BJP crowd is conspicuous. There are school students in uniform and the youth have come prepared with face paint and flags, much like they would for an IPL match at the Ferozeshah Kotla stadium not far away.

And there are the *others*. I sit down with a group of five friends and they smell of alcohol in the afternoon. All smiles, they tell me they do nothing and were getting bored whiling away time in their Shastri Park bylanes. “*Idhar music hai, masti hai. Bas hit gana suno, aur ladki dekho*” (It’s fun here, Just sit back, listen to music and check out girls). On cue, the loudspeakers blare yet another *Rang De Basanti* number.

Many young couples have walked in too; one can tell because they avoid the cameras. Families are regulars in the evening and also after dinner. The police

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<sup>17</sup> In ‘*The Structural Transformation Of The Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into A Category Of Bourgeois Society*’ (1962)(1989) Habermas sketches the degeneration of media from print-based journalism to the electronic media of the twentieth century in an analysis that, as his critics maintain, tends to idealize earlier print media and journalism within a democratic public sphere contrasted to an excessively negative sketch of later electronic media and consumption in a debased public sphere of contemporary capitalism. For Habermas, the function of the media have thus been transformed from facilitating rational discourse and debate within the public sphere into shaping, constructing and limiting public discourse to those themes validated and approved by media corporations. Hence, the interconnection between a sphere of public debate and individual participation has been fractured and transmuted into that of a realm of political information and spectacle in which citizen-consumers ingest and absorb passively entertainment and information. ‘Citizens’, thus, become spectators of media presentations and discourse which mould public opinion, reducing consumer/citizens to objects of news, information, and public affairs. See, Habermas, Jurgen, ‘Further Reflections on the Public Sphere’ in Calhoun, Craig (Ed.). (1992). *Habermas And The Public Sphere*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 438; Habermas, Jurgen (1962). (1991). *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a category of Bourgeois Society*, Burger, Thomas & Lawrence, Frederick trans. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press; Pusey, Michael (1987). *Jurgen Habermas: Key Sociologists*. London: Routledge; Kellner, Douglas: *Habermas, the Public Sphere, and Democracy: A Critical Intervention* (<http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/kellner.html> retrieved on 16.01.2011 ).

should take credit: it's their host-like graciousness that has made this middle-class family entertainment possible. With so many of them deployed here, mob aggression is naturally under check, though one constable did get slapped around (nobody was really sure why)<sup>18</sup> till his colleagues rescued him (Mazoomdaar, 2011: 28-30).

A section of Television journalist has been quick in applauding the restraints maintained by the youths in both the Team Anna as well as Baba Ramdev's movements and patting the back of the "Indian youths" in juxtaposition to the "Youths in London".<sup>19</sup> However, what these TV journalists fail to read is that the former has ostensibly claimed and projected itself to be non-violent and Gandhian in spirit. And it is here, that we witness the paradoxes within movements claiming to be inspired by Gandhi and yet, remaining muted on the issue of the use of 'Non-Violence' as a lived mantra in a democratic environment.

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<sup>18</sup> The Civilian Police in India always seem to bear the brunt of the mob. The *proximity* of the Civilian Police makes them the closest and most easily identifiable face of the Government and the State, and therefore, the first to bear the mob fury. I emphasize on the point of proximity because of the simple reason that people in India get to interact at least facially or non-verbally with the civilian police on an everyday basis. The interaction with the military police is very limited and channeled by what Sanjay Barbora calls the 'garrison mentality'. The Army Jawans seldom exchange words with the local community and spend years in their camps without interacting or learning the local languages/customs and think/suffer from superiority complex. By speaking in Hindi (Official language of India) and maintaining their North Indian/Gangetic lifestyle within their camps in the North-East, they think they have upheld Indianness and recreated a mini-India within their camps/garrisons. *See*, Barbora, Sanjay. (2006). Rethinking India's Counter-Insurgency campaign in the North-East. *Economic & Political Weekly*. September 2-8: 3805-3812.

An interesting point to be observed here is that though the interaction between the civilian population and the military police is very limited thanks to media projections the military personnel are elevated to the positions of 'heroes' defending the nation while the civilian police is demonized (Ed.). Media feeds the public with the image that the civilian police unlike its counterpart the military police is not dedicating their lives for the 'nation'. Media thus feeds and sustains the common perception that the civilian police is highhanded, corrupt and eating the nation from within while the military police is projected as protecting the frontiers of the nation i.e. '*ekta and akhandata*' of Bharat/India.

<sup>19</sup> A rally organised on 6 August 2011 in response to the fatal shooting of Mark Duggan by Metropolitan Police Service firearms officers on 4 August 2011 turned violent and a riot began in Tottenham, North London. In the following days, rioting spread to several London boroughs and districts and eventually became uncontrollable. The riots were characterised by young people actively participating in rampant looting and arson attacks of unprecedented levels. *See*, O'Brien, Paraic (2011). London riots: Looting & Violence continues. London: *BBC Radio 5*. 8 August 2011. [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-14439970](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-14439970) (retrieved on 27.10.2011); London riots: The third night. (2011). *The Guardian News Blog*. 8 August 2011. [www.guardian.co.uk/uk/blog/2011/august/08/london-riots-third-night-live](http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/blog/2011/august/08/london-riots-third-night-live) (retrieved on 27.10.2011).

### III

#### Some Closing Observations

To bring my arguments to a closure I would revert back and say that celebrated as it is, the ‘Gandhian world-visions’ remains thoroughly contentious generating much academic as well as non-academic murmurings ranging from total acceptance to strong rebuttal to an uncomfortable chocked acceptance (Parekh, 2001:111-126). The chocked acceptance of iconography of Gandhi can be best illustrated by the popular saying: ‘*Majboori ka naam Mahatma Gandhi*’ (Compromise, thy name is Mahatma Gandhi).<sup>20</sup> People in contemporary times in India are compelled to accept Gandhi uncritically as the convenient and effective icon for consensus building in a fragmented and contested socio-political terrain. Whether we want it or not Indians fall back on Gandhi, making Gandhi over the years in post colonial India ephemeral, infallible and godlike. The cinematic projections and the statist enterprise in unison have put Gandhi on a pedestal and isolated Gandhi from contemporary ground realities in India. So much so that in general there is a strong feeling that had Gandhi been born a few years ahead of the Indian National Movement he could have well been declared a ‘God’ by the large masses in India.

While gleaning ‘Gandhi’ in popular imaginations and in the statist enterprise it becomes crucial to reconceptualise ‘Violence’ and look at it as a lived experience construed and contextualized against temporal and spatial realities of a given society. There is an urgent need in India to re-look at ‘violence/non-violence’ and engage not just academicians, and activists but also the larger citizenry in this project of understanding ‘violence/non-violence’. ‘Violence’ is not just about physical coercions, or force, or statist armed enterprise but comes in variational degrees and so does ‘non-violence’.

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<sup>20</sup> All loose translation mine.

And closely related to the above understanding is the need to consider 'Voice' or 'Audibility' as the capacity of individuals, communities and civil society to influence the government's decisions on issues that affect their lives. It also refers to a wide range of measures such as complaints, organised protests, lobbying and participation in decision-making and product delivery. This voice is often political in nature and content; in other words it takes the form of activist citizenry. The quest for inclusion of these 'voices', remains the core theme of the process of decentralisation since the early 90s. Issues of effective people's participation, accountability and responsiveness of the state, and citizens as stakeholders of development still plague our visions for social transformation. New strategies, innovative programmes and advocacy with the governments continue to be the under-lying theme to achieve greater people's participation and true democracy in India. And in this sense Gandhian World-visions encounter innovative enterprise in terms of interpretation, applicability and end results in contemporary times in India.

Also in drawing a closure to my arguments on the popular imagery of Gandhi over the years, I would say that in contemporary times, there is an urgent need to read, re-read, unread Gandhi spatially and temporally. The wave of Gandhigiri that has gripped and encapsulated the public in India while substantiating the Habermasian conceptualisation of the public sphere, where private people came together to form a public whose 'public reason' would work as a check on state power, where the public sphere consisted of organs of information and political debate such as newspapers and journals (Dahlgren, & Sparks, (Ed.) 1991; Stevenson, 1995) , as well as institutions of political discussion such as political clubs, public assemblies, meeting halls, and other public spaces where socio-political discussion takes place (Calhoun, (Ed.). 1992; Habermas, 1962 (1991); Pusey, 1987; Goode, 2005). It doubly

accentuates the factors that eventually resulted in the decay of the public sphere, including the growth of a commercial mass media which turned the critical public into a passive consumer public; and the welfare state, which merged the state with society so thoroughly that the public sphere was squeezed out (Goode, 2005:120-141). It also turned the ‘public sphere’ into a site of self-interested contestation for the resources of the state rather than a space for the development of a public-minded rational consensus. The rise of the Internet and social networking- *Facebook, Tweeter, You Tube* just to name a few has expanded the realm for democratic participation and debates further enhancing the possibility of new public spaces for political intervention.<sup>21</sup> The ‘new media’ just as the ‘old’ has produced ‘new public spheres and spaces’ for information, debate, and participation (Gitlin in Liebes, & Curran, (Ed.) 1998: 168–175).

The methods of the neo-Gandhian movements in contemporary times though ostensibly claiming to be ‘Non-violent’ and peaceful, exhibit traces of anger and disgruntledness against and towards the ‘System’. The youth force that Gandhigiri attempts to channel and tap remains largely distanced from the teachings and perplexed by the ideologies and methodologies of Gandhi. In short, the youths fail to read Gandhi in spirit and in letter and contextualize Gandhi against and within the ambit of the constricting as well as expanding realities of contemporary times in India. Through these appreciations and depreciations of the popular iconography of Gandhi in India we find that ‘brand Gandhi’ and its shelf-life relies heavily on the manoeuvrings and ‘media management’ of the manipulative market (Chatterjee, 2004; Damodaran, 2008; Fernandes, 2006; Srinivas, 2011:31-33).

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<sup>21</sup> Such spheres and spaces contain both the potential to invigorate democracy, increase the dissemination of critical and progressive ideas as well as new possibilities for manipulation, social control, promotion of conservative positions, and intensification of differences between people. Participation in these ‘new public spheres’ reflects the emerging sphere of ‘cyberspace democracy’. See, Habermas, Jurgen, ‘Further Reflections on the Public Sphere’ in Calhoun, (Ed.). 1992:438; Habermas, 1962 (1991); Pusey, 1987.

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