A Melting Pot of Cognitive Frameworks: Influences on Philosophy and Action of Mahatma Gandhi

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[Editorial Note: The present paper talks about how various existing theories of early twentieth century received a spiritual and practical outcome by the philosophies of Gandhi. D.A.]

Abstract: *Both conceptual and practical heralds of Gandhi for facilitating nationwide anti-colonial movements backed up by immense mass support had already been there in late nineteenth and early twentieth century nascent and restricted nationalist sentiments. Also, quite surprisingly in the writings of colonial administrators perpetuated as a part of colonial investigative modalities for knowledge formation, we get archetypal tincture of conceptualizing village society as the socio-cultural core of Indian civilization, later embraced by Gandhi and his fellow nationalists of twentieth century. All these prevalent knowledge and sentiments came into practice with political endeavors of Swadeshi movement of 1905 in Bengal. The present article is an effort to show that all these existing theories and practices catered Gandhi's political philosophy and pragmatic moves who blended them into the contextual necessities of his times. He simultaneously engaged himself in rediscovering, evolving, and expressing these prevalent components in order to suit his contemporaneous realities.*

Keywords: *Colonial Administrators, Drain Theory, Village Community, Western Civilization, Samaj, Swadeshi, Mahatma Gandhi*

Introduction:

Since antiquity, knowledge passes down from one generation to the other through a percolating process as part of a ceaseless tradition. Every generation picks up worthy parts among this available cognition, keeping in mind their surrounding contexts, and shapes them up accordingly. Following this generally accepted view, the historians dealing mainly with colonial rule in the subcontinent have recurrently pointed to the colonial categories of knowledge and the nationalist discourse. However, this gradual process was infiltrating in nature too. The colonial investigative modalities for reigning purposes had influenced extensively late nineteenth century anti-colonial thinkers in developing their political, social, and cultural views regarding the newly emerging concept of nation. This knowledge next passed down to twentieth century during which, it received its final momentum in the forms of nationwide anti-colonial popular movements spearheaded by charismatic Mahatma Gandhi.

Mahatma Gandhi's arrival in India in 1915 from South Africa was like a fresh wind blowing over the crumbling dominoes of existing nationalist politics. Besides his political achievements in South Africa, another reason that brought him fame in the subcontinent

even before his arrival was his most original work, Hind Swaraj, considered till date one of the fiercest criticisms of modern western civilization. He was the first nationalist leader in Indian history to tour extensively across the nation upon his arrival. The firsthand knowledge that he acquired owning to this tour in village India, shaped some of his ideological views steadfastly. This in turn started to alter the course of nationalist movement in Indian history. All these corroboratively while shaping Mahatma, both internally and externally, led him to launch first three local level *Satyagrahas*; Champaran Satyagraha, Kheda Satyagraha and Ahmedabad Satyagraha, followed by three nationwide movements; Non-cooperation Khilafat movement, Civil Disobedience movement, Quit India Movement. The source of Gandhi's charisma in binding India together irrespective of class, caste, gender, religion, and region was undoubtedly his theoretical and practical originalities. However, most of Gandhi's philosophy and action which are regarded predominately original are actually end results of many preexisting ideas. This article primarily attempts to argue this. It tries to highlight on the process of investigative modalities pioneered by colonial administrators which in due process brought forth an archetypal image for structuring Indian society, revolving around its core organizational unit, village community. It also discusses Drain Theory, a late nineteenth century brain child of anti-colonial thinkers, largely molded by colonial knowledge formation process and how it had initiated the central theme of romanticized and essentialized traditional Indian village society and its gradual ruination in the nationalist discourse. How Gandhi's idea centered on individual's duties and responsibilities towards community life was also a harbinger of the prevalent notion regarding Indian *Samaj* that has also been mentioned here. This article harps on how the skeptical approaches that were evinced by the same anti-colonial thinkers of late nineteenth and early twentieth century pertaining to modern western civilization, finally culminated in the conceptually critical framework proposed by Gandhi in his Hind Swaraj. It clarifies how Gandhi's ideas regarding *Desh Seva* and politics orbited around spirituality, and were actually influenced by philosophical and moral notions conveyed by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Swami Vivekananda and Gopal Krishna Gokhale. The last section of this article is the *Swadeshi* movement of early twentieth century in Bengal that had drawn much of its thematic inspirations from these existing cognitional discourses, crystallized since the late nineteenth century. Bengal, being an enriched hub of late nineteenth-century anti-colonial thinkers and succeeding nationalists of twentieth century, provided many juncture points of ideological innovations and discoveries of indigenous texts. This period also witnessed urban educated young volunteers participating full-time in rural level organizational and reform work. Thus, for the first time, the socio-cultural gap was bridged not just in theory, but in practice as well. The culminating end came with Gandhi who addressed the bulk of his major political and socio-economic issues from the above-mentioned angles, albeit in a more all-encompassing manner. Gandhi being the convergence point of all these prevalent knowledges provided a condensed melting pot of cognitive frameworks to the nation for its struggle against its alien rule.

Colonizers on Indian Villages:

The image of traditional village is an inseparable part of the idea of India. It has long been perceived as one of the appropriate components for understanding the traditional Indian society marked by authentic native life uncorrupted by outside influence. Thus, Ronald Inden has rightly pointed out that in the western opinion, though most other civilizations of the Orient were primarily agrarian economies, it was only the Indian society that was essentialized into a land of villages (Inden 1990: 30). The caste system and the village communities were perhaps the two most important parameters on which the colonial ethnographic studies were made rather extensively to make sense of Indian society and to distinguish it from the West. In the case of the latter on the other hand, state held the central position. For present day professional sociologists and modern anthropologists too, Indian village represents a microcosm of real India's basic unit of socio-cultural structures. Anthropologists and historians dealing with colonial rule in India have convincingly demonstrated the intertwined play of the nexus of colonial power and knowledge in conceptualizing the Indian village. It was predicated upon the *modus operandi* of the colonial state that necessarily viewed these realities in terms of its own imperatives of consolidating an empire over an alien land (Thakur 2005: 27). The British colonial rulers obviously had their own political reasons for perceiving India as they did and imputing qualities such as autonomy, stagnation, and continuity of the village life in the subcontinent. It helped them justify their rule over the subcontinent especially to their people back home in Britain (Jodhka 2002: 3343). A close examination of the colonial writings produced by; colonial administrators like Charles Metcalf, Mountstuart Elphinstone, Sir Henry Summer Maine; western political philosophers like Karl Marx; Military personals like Lt. General Robert Baden-Powell, makes it clear that western writers embarked upon mainly two facets of the Indian village community; it is a self-sufficient republic, and it is stagnant in nature (Dumont 1966, 2002). They could look at the Indian village more as a unit of knowledge about Indian society than a mere unit of colonial administration. They perceived Indian society as a sum total of its multitude of 'little village republics'. After the introduction of the decennial census and the change in orientation of the colonial investigative modalities, the caste-view of Indian society seems to have overtaken the village-view (Cohn 1987, 1997). However, these administrators never denied that these two institutions were unremittingly connected. Indian nationalism, as argued effectively by Partha Chatterjee, although premised on an opposition to colonial rule, remained ultimately contained by the same dominant conceptual frameworks that it repudiated (Chatterjee 1986: 167-72). Thus, long after the British relegated the Indian village to the backseat in favor of caste as an important parameter for understanding Indian society, the notion of self-sufficient village republic continued to stir the nationalist imagination. The influence of Sir Henry Maine and that of other western colonial writings on the Indian village society is visible throughout the career of nationalist leaders like Gandhi (Gandhi 1948:79) and Nehru (Jodhka 2002: 3345-6). Irrespective of their attitude

and overall ideological orientation towards it, village for all of them was a civilizational entity[1]. More importantly, they seemed to have assumed that the social structure of the village was similar everywhere in the subcontinent (Jodhka 2002: 3345).

This image of an idyllic, self-contained, craft work producing village community life which remained constant irrespective of dynastic changes or any other external forces was a central theme of discussion by intellectuals in metropolitan as well. In Great Exhibition of 1851 and Colonial and Imperial Exhibition of 1886 at Liberty's Department Store, London, India was portrayed as a timeless, unchanging, ancient land, dotted with jungles, natives, and village *bazaars*, at once geographically and temporally removed from the hectic pace of industrial life. For armchair anthropologist, Sir Henry Maine, the Indian village thus existed at an earlier, pre-capitalist stage of Britain's own evolution from tradition to modernity (Mathur 2011: 32-3). This view also dominated the late Victorian art critics and reformers in their preservationist approaches to India's cultural products. Among the most prominent of these figures was George Birdwood, art critic and collector, who attributed the greatness of India's cultural products to the social structures of the Indian village (Mathur 2011: 30). By adopting these images and practices, Gandhi and his contemporary nationalists consolidated their economic, political and spiritual vision for the nation into simple yet powerful physical form. During the twenties and the thirties of twentieth century, the peak hour of Gandhi's 'Constructive Work Programme', it was claimed by many of his fellow nationalists and constructive workers that many cottage industries including *Khadi* had an authentic legacy deeply entrenched in India's traditional past and should be revived in due time. These craftworks and their techniques, like their beholder traditional village community, remained uninterrupted and thus, in their views, had an inherent quality of representing India's socio-economic reality (Mookerjee 1940: 15-24).

Indians on Indian Villages:

Nationalist movements of every kind, in general, try to show the nation and its legacy actually as a product of a conjuncture, modernity substantiated by the notion of revival of a lost antiquity. So, although a modern phenomenon, nationalism must speak a traditional language of communities (Kaviraj 2010:21-2). And in this process of tracing the antiquity

[1] During the latter half of colonial period, an idea, nation vs. civilization, became popular in Indian nationalist discourse. Intellectuals like Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore and Jawaharlal Nehru had contributed largely to this whole discourse. Modern nation state speaks a language of similarities, either in form of language or religion or ethnicity etc. Various parts of India that the colonial ruler claimed to have unified through their iron fist of law and order, science, and technology, had almost nothing in common. Indian intellectuals tried to utilize these dissimilar components spreading across the subcontinent to show that India's uniqueness had always been its vastness of diversity. According to them, this made India a perfect example of civilization, above often artificially claimed oneness of modern nation state. Indian village though was same in their eyes across the subcontinent in terms of few essentialized components, however, was understandable to them too in terms of its regional and local variations owing to different customs and traditions. This construction of unity amidst diversity in village life, the core unit of India, made village the essential component of the idea of Indian Civilization.

for legitimization, an "invented tradition" is always born (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1989: 5). Following this inventory process for a valid legacy, the late nineteenth-century economic thought of India's anti-colonial discourse provided impetus to the popular theme of a subsequent discourse, namely, the romanticized traditional village society. The status it acquired after coming into contact with knowledge produced by colonizers became a major theme of discussion in late nineteenth century and continued to gain more attention throughout early twentieth century. Usual depictions in Mughal chronicles and travel accounts of foreign travelers indicate that peace and plenty reigned supreme in India's self-sufficient villages alongside health, wealth, contentment, and leisure (Rameshwari 1940: 135). In 1787, Sir Henry Cotton commented, "The yearly export of Dacca muslin to England amounted to Rs. 3,00,00,000 approximately" (Mookerjee 1940: 16). Lord Clive remarked too, during the reign of Sirajaudullah, Murshidabad was "as prosperous and rich as the city of London" (Mookerjee 1940: 16). Thus, the India of these accounts and statements was a flourishing land with a large and prosperous economy, at the same time consisting of self-sustaining egalitarian village communities[2], capable of producing their own subsistence. A perceptible economic downfall coupled with India's growing financial backwardness, increasing debt, the disintegration of previous rural societal forms became a major concern in Indian nationalist discourse of nineteenth and twentieth century. Need of reviving the cottage and small-scale industries became the most important juncture where they all spoke almost the same language (Jodhka 2002: 33-49).

Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, there was an ongoing debate between two opposing school of economists on the nature of the economic process that India underwent during the British rule. One school, consisting of British officials and writers, declared that India was growing more prosperous as well as undergoing economic development as a byproduct of Pax Britanica's modern progressive skills. The areas, in general, through which this progress became possible, according to them, were law and order, an efficient administration, an honest and efficient bureaucracy, development of railways, growing commerce, increased irrigation and increase in the area of cultivation. This optimistic side of development faced few unavoidable hindrances, in their opinion, due to issues such as rapidly increasing population, India's financial weakness or its incapacity because of its poverty, shortage of internal capital or inadequate capital formation within the country. Additionally,

[2] West had multiple encounters with India since ancient times, each encounter leading it to conceive different judgmental perspectives regarding India. Their views pertaining to the lands of East had always possessed tincture of otherized components. One among the many components of these otherized views were, East was timeless hence changeless too. This idea received most attention along with affirmation too during colonial period as it was well suited with colonial ruler's portrayal of Indian villages as self- sufficient entities. Through their investigative modalities, the colonial administrators established an essentialized constituent for understanding India that Indian villages were immutable in nature, untouched by external changes.

backwardness of Indian customs, habits and social institutions was seen by some of them as another obstacle to development (Chandra 1999: 116).

The other side, though not truly nationalist, was at least staunchly anti-imperialist or anti-colonial in tone (Chandra 1999: 116). Their demands were based on fundamental changes in the existing economic relations between India and Britain. This made their economic demands radically nationalist while their political demands remained moderate in nature (Chandra 1966: 744). Through their demands, the first sustained articulation of nationalism in South Asia crystallized around the notion of a territorially specified economic collective which eventually evolved into a national knowledge of political economy in the 1870's and 1880's (Goswami 1998: 611). These arguments subsequently clustered around a concrete form of theoretical aspect, popularly known as the Drain Theory, which later resulted in the economic nationalism of early twentieth century and the Deindustrialization theory of left nationalists in late twentieth century. Thus, we find, Ramesh Chandra Dutt's classic weaver thump story, mentioned in his Economic History of India, a seminal late nineteenth century text on Drain Theory, left such a deep and indelible impact that it was preached by twentieth-century nationalist leaders in their mass propaganda work (Home Department, Political Branch (Confidential Files 675/31. *Weaver Thump Story and Alleged Statement by a Collector of Faridpur*: 8).

Though the ancestry of this theory can be traced back to Raja Rammohan Roy (Chandra 1966: 637), it was a small band of Maharashtrian intellectuals who first made the economic drain, in all its implications, the principal medium of their bitter attack on British colonial rule in the early 1840's. According to them, the main constituent elements of the drain were decline of indigenous industry, transfer of wealth, excessive taxation, over-assessment of land revenue, unemployment of Indians in important civil and military positions, and expensive nature of British administration (Naik 2001: 4428-9). Rammohan Roy, the supposed ideological harbinger of the theory, was in search of a modernized Indian economy and polity with a viable rural base. What he had in mind was a process of modernization that involved the vast masses of rural population through whom the growth impulse could travel upward and forward on a massive scale. He however had a vision of future India's village communities as the renovated and restructured nuclei of a modern economic organization (Ganguli 1978:88-90). In one of his letters to Nehru, Gandhi too expressed his imaginary futuristic views on India's ideal village unit (Gandhi 1941: 421; 1945: 320; Natesan 1922: 336-44). Thus, both of their writings reflect more of a reformist view rather than a revivalist one. Rammohan was the first Indian intellectual who voiced his complaint against 'tribute' system (Ganguli 1978: 92). Later in the century, Dadabhai Naoroji spoke of the colonial economic drain primarily as an internal drain of the poverty-stricken India of the villages and secondarily an external drain of the prosperous India of the towns. His general context too was similar to that of Rammohan Roy. In the 1870's, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee had written acutely about the misery of Bengal peasants, foregrounding their exploitation by Indian landlords, in a series of essays which were

collected as *Samya* (equality) (Sarkar 2008: 434). Later in his life he admitted that substantial wealth was probably being transferred to Britain in the form of payments to colonial administrators, for which India was getting nothing in return. He was aware of the fact of deindustrialization but did not possess, and could not construct for himself, a conceptual apparatus (Chatterjee 1986: 46). Romesh Chandra Dutt, while assessing India's overall economic backwardness, discoursed on the evils of high revenue assessments under the British system of land tenure and the related problems of mass poverty and famines as part of an integrated whole. He was not only a strong advocate of India's industrial development, but he was also vocal about rejuvenation of the small-scale cottage industries as a kind of insurance against famine (Ganguli 1978: 184-200). The slow but steady industrial decline that had started around the mid 1820's had reached a crisis point by the 1860's (Dey 2009: 858). Spurred on by repeated famines and the increasingly perceptible dissonance between Britain's prosperity and advance, and India's misery and backwardness, the nineteenth-century Indian intellectuals turned towards a self-conscious nationalism, which often placed the poverty of the country at the heart of its critique of foreign rule. Such emphasis persisted in diverse forms throughout the colonial era and beyond. It is from this focus on Indian poverty that pattern of thinking and eventually actions emerged, that resulted in seeking remedies in varied recognizably developmental directions (Sarkar 2008: 433). Even the Gandhian model, which is sometimes designated as anti-developmental for its rejection of industrialized modernity, carries not many differences. It too was based on a passionate concern for mass poverty and tried to combine periodic mass campaigns with sustained village level 'Constructive Work', geared to promote self-reliance (Sarkar 2008: 435).

This subsequent economic stagnation along with increasing poverty, inequality and disintegration of traditional village life as the principal impact of colonial rule is viewed in the historical analysis of both Indian economic nationalists and Marxist anti-imperialist third world historians or left nationalists. It is perceived by both groups that British rule, by its revenue policy and by forced production for the market broke up the existing infrastructures. Production for the market had not been profitable enough and consequently led to widespread rural debt which jeopardized the economy. Thus, while on one hand, deindustrialization added to rural poverty by pushing many former artisans into agriculture, on the other, it gave control of the land to the moneyed people who were, by nature, averse to productive investment (Arnold 1976: 143). In contrast to typically considered destructive impact, caused by the colonial rule, the revisionist approach looks into the creative impacts on organizational and production pattern system. These changes, according to them had stimulated ultimately more significant effects in long run (Roy 1999: 3). However, the revisionist analysis could also not deny the fact that the subsequent changes in the formational structure of the traditional village society did happen.

However, the main issue that these anti colonial thinkers raised was not that of per capita income or destruction of handicrafts but of economic development (Chandra 1979: 118).

They all, without exception, accepted that the English introduced some structural changes and nearly all of them welcomed these changes as the entry point of progressive wind from the West. Modern industry, in their view, was necessary, if the diverse people of India were to be united into a single nation on the basis of common interests. The anti-colonial writers had not used "economic decay" to mean decay of handicrafts but signified the arrested growth of India's industrialization and modernization. None of them had really condemned the destruction of the pre-British economic structure, except nostalgically and out of some sort of sympathy (Chandra 1979: 120-1). The content of a letter written by Ramesh Chandra Dutt on 16th September 1886, to Bankim Chandra Chatterjee substantiated this view quite amply (Bhattacharya 1941: 53-4). However, it cannot be completely refuted that these anti-colonial economic thinkers of the late nineteenth century also believed that the traditional, indigenous handicraft industries would play an important role in the economy for a long time to come, especially in providing employment to the millions (Chandra 1999:165). Therefore, they made the protection, rehabilitation, reorganization, and modernization of such industries an important part of their economic programme. All of these influenced Gandhi in many of his socio-economic policies for rural reform through revival and rejuvenation of lost village and cottage industries and his national emblem, *Khadi* (Gandhi 1934: 414; 1935: 55; 1939: 239). Even the economic content of the famous independence pledge of 26th January, 1930 amply demonstrated its derivation from the Indian economic thought of the last century as it accused British government i) for deprivation and exploitation, ii) for revenue extraction and economic ruin, iii) for destruction of village and cottage industries, iv) for differences of customary duties in import and export (Ganguli 1978: 279).

It was perhaps in 1894 that Gandhi for the first time invoked the idea of the Indian village as a political symbol though for a different purpose. After his return to India, he counterpoised the village to the city and presented the village life as a critique of, and an alternative to, the modern western culture and civilization. In order to wage a nationwide mass struggle against the colonial regime, he needed a different set of ideas or an ideology that would delegitimize the British rule over India (Jodhka 2002: 3346-7) The political passivity of the masses, especially in the villages, consciously inculcated and nurtured by the colonial authorities, was a basic factor in the stability and safety of colonial rule. It had to be replaced by mass participation .and mobilization in politics (Thakur 2005: 21). The challenge for the nationalists was to work out a case where India could be represented as a single cultural and political entity, based on which they could imagine nationhood for India. To the advantage of these ideologues of the nationalist and regional movements, the colonial rulers had already done a considerable amount of groundwork on this (Jodhka 2002: 3345). In the process of gathering this data they also deployed several categories that enabled them to make sense of the Indian society. They tried to situate it in the available evolutionary schema that was being worked out in the western academy around the same time.

Contrary to western political philosophers like Karl Marx, the inability of the village to historically transform itself was not seen as a marker of backwardness. Rather, this immutability became the sign of its cultural confidence and civilizational strength. By refusing to bow to the vicissitudes of political history, the village showed its inherent capacity for resistance. And, it was this resistance to get bogged down by the tumultuous historical currents that saved it from decay and dissolution, notwithstanding the might of the invaders and colonizers. The point is that the same set of characteristics that were deemed to be responsible for the stagnation and immutability of the Indian village came to be seen as signs of its vitality and institutional endurance by Gandhi and his fellow nationalists (Thakur 2005: 26). The urban middle classes, which were championing the nationalist cause, needed the village to bolster their claims to be the true representatives of the Indian nation. By making the village the site of public policy debates, they could bridge the cultural gap between their own urbanity and the rural, rustic tradition of the village (Ludden 1985: 6-17). Gandhi and his political symbols became its ideal meditational point (Parel 1969: 514). The village India was now an archetypal colonial problem. By holding colonialism responsible for the problems of village India, such as famines and poverty, low agricultural production and indebtedness, the nationalist intelligentsia not only challenged the colonial domination but also imparted a distinctively nationalist interpretation to the idea of the village (Thakur 2005: 29-30).

It became impossible to imagine India as a unified nation without its seven hundred thousand villages where eighty percent of its population dwelled at that time (Gandhi 1936: 298; Rameshwari 1940: 136). Villages of traditional India were portrayed in this nationalist discourse as self-governing and self-sufficient units. Barter economy prevailed; all trade and credit transactions were based on human relationships rather than on mere profit and loss balance sheet accounts (Unknown 1941: 170). Different *varnas*, including lower orders followed their respective professions and rejoiced in simple amusements, which in turn provided nostalgic representation of supposed enduring bases of social unity (Gupta 2006: 300). In ideological terms, the village, with all its inflated virtues of horizontally divided *varna*[3], provided a counterfoil to the much criticized hierarchic and undemocratic colonial notions of caste (Thakur 2005: 28). These heterogeneities that were given to Hindu society in *varna* were not supposed to be erased by the abstractions of a homogenizing

[3] People belonging to lower *Varna*s had experienced oppression in the name of hierarchical notion of caste throughout India's historical time and space. The nationalist leaders of colonial times were mostly all upper caste educated professionals (particularly men) who were well aware of this. Therefore, they implemented a politically correct strategy pertaining to the caste question when it started gaining importance as a mobilizing political factor. Through showing that these social divisions had actually maintained an atmosphere of harmony, the nationalist leaders made an effort to deny all existing tincture of derogatory treatments. Besides, they needed an all-encompassing support irrespective of caste, class, religion, and gender to establish themselves as true leaders of the nation.

ideal of citizenship in a nation state (Bilgrami 2011: 104). Nationalists viewed that in place of this asymmetrical apparatus of pre-modern state society power division, British brought a highly centralized, technologically effective apparatus of control (Kaviraj 2010: 57). This penetration into a subsistence agrarian society eroded patron-client relationships that despite being unequal provided minimum security for all. The disruption of this security and the increasing differentiation is then seen to be followed by rural instability (Beck and Roy 1995: 442).

Indian *Samaj*:

European history, based on state-centric aggrandizement, was set negatively in the nationalist discourse of early twentieth century against the Indian civilization, a symbol of syncretic unification, preached through its community life (Bhattacharya 2011: 8). Bhudev Mukhopadhyay, one of the original anti-colonial thinkers of the late nineteenth century saw community life of Indian civilization as its central locus of prime importance (Kaviraj 2010: 267). It is generally assumed that most of the religions in agrarian societies of the East followed logic of ascribing the power of the legislative constitution of society to divine authority, with a crucial mediating role being played by religious intellectuals while marginalizing the power and authority of the state (Kaviraj 2012: 53). *Samaj* or society was therefore prioritized over polity and seen as providing continuity from the past, essential for bringing the collective self into existence. Therefore, fulfillment of duties and responsibilities towards one's own community as opposed to western concept of individual rights protected by state had always been the fulcrum of Indian *Samaj*. The politically and economically decentralized self-sustained village community of the pre-modern era facilitated that concept of continuation (Gupta 2006: 280). Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, late nineteenth century novelist and anti-colonial thinker in Bengal, wrote that the active *Sanyasa* expounded by *Gita* raised actions to the level of duties and responsibilities. This set of duties and responsibilities to the family, society and community had always been equal to *Dharma* in India (Gowda 2011: 24; Kaviraj 1995: 111). Bhudev Mukhopadhyay once commented that Indian society had always been more concerned with the general well-being of all the containing elements than in seeking self-interest or having quest for wealth and power through ruthless competition (Raychaudhuri 1999: 39-40). This was further explicitly preached by Rabindranath Tagore in his Swadeshi Samaj speech. Gandhi's concept of *Swadeshi* attributed love toward neighbors in forms of duties and responsibilities (Gandhi 1944: 171) and thus the Indian idea of *Dharma* provided basic conceptual echelon for Gandhian Constructive Work. For Gandhi though these particular duties and responsibilities became the true source of rights in Indian context (Tercheck 1998:28).

Civilizational Counters:

Gandhi is often regarded as the first Indian intellectual to provide a fundamentally cut-throat criticism of western civilization in Indian nationalist discourse. But here, he was preceded by anti-colonial or nationalist thinkers of late nineteenth century who even in

their admiration for the West had remained conspicuously selective. Though vaguely in most instances, they nonetheless hinted at some real sickness of western civilization which was later used by Gandhi in his refutation of modern nation-state's superiority. In the general consensus of late nineteenth century, India was portrayed as a country with spiritual and moral superiority that had nothing to learn from the West except in fields of practical matters of political economy, science, and technology. This sentiment of religious superiority appeared because of direct confrontational debate with western missionaries. We find this admiration for western superiority over practical spheres in the writings of anti-colonial thinkers of late nineteenth century like Bhudev Mukhopadhyay. He expressed sharp criticism of modern European statecraft but showed deep admiration for two achievements of European modernity, namely, political economy, the European science of improving the wealth of nations, and the growth of modern science (Kaviraj 2012: 61).

European civilization's desperation for consumerism appeared to be a very flawed aspect to a person like Keshab Chandra Sen, who was otherwise renowned for his fervent admiration for the West. Vivekananda wrote approvingly of the sophisticated pleasures of Parisian life, but was repelled by the logical climax of western consumerism. Materialism, in the eyes of such observers, was not an abstract description to rubbish the West, but almost a palpable sickness of the soul which they found truly appalling. In their view, the factory industry on which the whole structure of consumption was based, transformed the worker into a mindless automaton and the consumer to an equally mindless slave of habit (Raychaudhuri 1999: 37). Gandhi later blamed this system of social production as the devilish source of modern imperialism. According to him, it was the limitless desire for great production and greater consumption which kept up this spirit of ruthless competition. This ran the entire system and impelled these countries to seek colonial possessions. Gandhi stated this position quite emphatically as early as in his most original political tract Hind Swaraj (1909) and held on to it throughout his life (Chatterjee 1984: 165; Herdia 1999: 1499). Unlike motives related to economic aggression and oppressive exclusivist nationalism pillared on a homogenous organic community in the modern state, the nation he talked about instead was a pluralistic political community (Parel 2011: 160). Bhudev Mukhopadhyay's rejection of the western proposals of modernity on four fundamental grounds was also later elaborated by Gandhi in his critique of modern western civilization. Bhudev's grounds for refutation of the western civilization were twofold: the depletion of emotional bonds within families in the hands of individualistic values of capitalist modern society; the destruction of the sense of community by making human relations competitive and aggressive. Bhudev also criticized the modern western state, which he felt were primarily effective engines of comprehensive war against other nation states. Such states, he believed, in the quest of narrow self-interest led them to deny self-determination, consequently justifying modern imperialism (Kaviraj 2012: 63-4).

Unlike above-mentioned anti-colonial Indian critic of the West and their limited ideational opposition, Gandhi saw nothing worth praising in modern civilization. His prescription was

that Indians should reject it totally and fall back on the tradition of India's primordial villages and high moral ideals (Raychaudhuri 1999: 42). Leo Tolstoy once wrote, "What does it mean that thirty thousand people, not athletes but rather weak and ill-looking, have enslaved 200 million of vigorous, clever, strong, freedom-loving people? Don't the figures make it clear that not the English but the Indians have enslaved themselves?" (Gandhi 1963: 241). Tolstoy's "simplicity of life and purity of purpose" had made the greatest impact on him, appearing recurrently in his writings and speeches. Therefore, he agreed to this point and according to him, Indians themselves were responsible for enslavement as they embraced capitalism and its associated legal and political structures. Gandhi was at pains to point out that India's struggle could not be against the British but against the civilization that they belonged to (Suhrud 2011:73). His remedy for national regeneration alongside eradication of this ailing contagion of western civilization was moral and utopian one. He suggested that Indians must eschew greed and lust for consumption and should revert to the village-based self-sufficient economy of the pre-colonial times. He viewed colonial cities in India as Bastille of modern civilization, responsible for exploitation and oppression by the British. Gandhi's emphasis on the dependency of these cities on villages for supply of food and raw materials which happened to be an ancient nature of city formation, since the time of Roman Empire, became a wide theme of discussion among active rural level organizers, mainly influenced by Gandhi. The opinion that one serious downfall in village production would give a blow to urban consumption and lifestyle, was supported both by Gandhi and his fellow nationalists (Gandhi 1937: 169; 1939: 259; 1940: 103; 1947a: 303; 1947b: 201; 1948: 365). Though Gandhi continued to see village as an alternative way of living, he also found many faults with the existing lifestyle of the rural people in the Indian countryside, namely the practice of untouchability and unsanitary habits of villagers (Gandhi 1919: 273; 1929a: 295; 1929b: 47; 1935: 324; 1936: 105; 1937: 217-8; 1940: 380; 1946: 105; 1947: 306-7). This concern led Gandhi and many of his contemporaries to take up courses of village reform (Kaviraj 2012: 68). His Hind Swaraj, though generally considered either a criticism of western civilization or a criticism of civil society, provided primarily a theory of salvation from this precarious downfall of humanity, not only for Indians but also for British. Thus, for Ashis Nandy, he appears as a counter modernist critic of the West (Nandy 1994: 2-4).

Spiritualization of Politics:

The origin of Gandhi's concept of professional *Satyagrahis* as the ideal *Desh Sevakas* lies in the term *Seva* whose roots are traceable to India's past. The duties of a *Sevaka*, namely *Seva*, traditionally rights performed to divinity, gained its popular and secular connotation around 1908. Amritlal V. Thakkar wrote to his brothers on 25th January 1914, a member of the Servants of India Society, an organization established by Gandhi's political guru Gopal Krishna Gokhale, that India needed full-time devoted workers for nation building (Srivatsan 2006: 428). Social service in Gokhale's opinion stood for a spiritualization that predisposed people to duty that could only be achieved by active political participation. The points of convergence with Gandhi were performance of duty and observance of

morality. These were described by him in convertible terms for his philosophy of action (Srivatsan 2006: 429). Therefore, Gandhi's definition and conception of *Seva* for full-time dedicated Congress and Constructive Work *Sevakas* had its genus in Gokhale's philosophy of action. Gandhi always preferred to use the word "service" to describe activity. His another significant term was "constructive" used as an adjective describing work, activity or program. We get a sense of the relationship between Constructive Work and *Seva* by mapping the use of the word "constructive" in Gandhi's correspondences (Thompson 1993: 230).

Swami Vivekananda, a Bengali ascetic, converted the life-denying philosophy of mystics into a practical creed of universal applicability by relating it to normal human experience. It meant revival of India's true religion which consisted of fearlessness, love and selfless action. Its root was spirituality which Vivekananda characterized as 'lifeblood' of India (Chakravarty 1992: 5). For Gandhi too politics without spirituality and religious morality was like a soulless icon of divinity (Gowda 2011: 178). There had been an implicit recognition of an existing disjuncture between morality and politics. Gandhi's unique utilization of the concept of Non-Violence and Truth bridged that gap (Gandhi 1925: 310). This anti-materialist and anti-technology sentiments, hostility to competitiveness, efforts to root a mobilizational politics in indigenous cultures, and an acutely voluntarist sensibility have particularly been characteristic of some varieties of Japanese and Chinese nationalism (Misra 2014: 706). Vivekananda's *Nishkam Karma* favored a bridge of mutual compassion between those who were intellectually, ethically, and economically strong and the poor and ignorant, who needed them the most. The weak, in his opinion, needed to follow the path of the learned by receiving guidance from them (Gowda 2011: 92). Gandhi's ascetic activists; namely, professional *Satyagrahis'* and Constructive Workers' approachability attributed same principles for their rural counterparts. He felt that forces of change are not going to be endogenous, that is, coming from within the village. Therefore, he advocated for the application of outside agents, who were professionally trained and educated on his ideological line.

***Swadeshi* Movement**:

The high point of late nineteenth century anti- colonial sentiments, often preached as romantic nationalism, was the *Swadeshi* movement triggered by the Partition of Bengal for a better administrative management, finalized by Viceroy Lord Curzon on 16th October 1905 (Chakrabarty 2004: 665). Bhudev Mukhopadhyay first used the term *Swadesh* (one's own land) alongside *Swajati* (one's own people) in his Samajik Prabandha. Gopal Hari Deshmukh, a Maharashtrian reformer of 1870's first used the term *Swadeshi* (goods of one's own land). Instead of prayers and petition, one strand of this movement facilitated Constructive *Swadeshi*, emphasizing the need for work at the village level. Such efforts at self-reliance together with the support of vernacular mediums and utilization of traditional popular customs and institution (like *Mela* or fair, *Jatra*) were felt to be the best method for drawing the masses into the national movements (Pandit 2015: 26). Once again, these techniques of organizing *Swadeshi* themed exhibitions, fairs, lantern shows were later used

to a great effect by Gandhi and his fellow Congressmen in his Constructive Work programme (Prabhu and Gandhi 1960: 37-9). The Constructive aspect of *Swadeshi* period had attracted many youths who later collaborated with revolutionary activists. There were revolutionary inner circles within many of these Constructive Work *Samitis* (Sarkar 1973: 299). Even Barindra Kumar Ghosh's group of young revolutionaries was attracted for a brief period by Rabindranath Tagore's scheme of constructing an ideal village community (Sarkar 1973: 294). This phase of constructive rural level activities was genuinely kept aloof from political agitation by its ardent advocates, mainly Tagore. Thus, though a predecessor in spirit, it was different from the future Gandhian Constructive Work schemes as many towering figures of Constructive Work very often attached themselves with conventional politics and Gandhi's nationwide movements. However, this wave of enthusiasm received serious setback after 1908, due to declining enthusiasm, disillusionment among youths, rise of underground revolutionary nationalism, sporadic outburst of rural violence and ambivalent attitude of its preachers.

In Tagore's seminal speech, Swadeshi Samaj, subsequently given at the Minerva and the Curzon theatre in 1904, this conceptual orientation of Constructive *Swadeshi* received its first most exposure. Here the traditional *Samaj* was hailed as the real centre of Indian community life and not the state which, by then, had been seen as the driving force of European spirit of centralization and violence. Besides reviving which is lost, Tagore expressed his dream of an ideal village model in this speech. The reforms that he proposed were not much different from that of Gandhi. While romanticizing the traditional village society, the urban educated middle-class youths were given the task of propagating *Swadeshi* in villages through *Melas, Jatras* and Lantern slides. To Tagore, *Swadeshi* meant a society taking a different stand in promoting self-reliance against the external forces of state (Flora 2002: 14; Sarkar 1973: 297). Later, Gandhi appeared on the scene and was able to synthesize, using Congress as a medium, Constructive *Swadeshi* and give it a moral orientation.

Tagore's proposal for organizing Village *Samitis* did not go unheard and started mushrooming. They were particularly numerous in Barisal, Faridpur, Mymensingh and Tippera. Five most successful of Constructive Work *Samitis* were situated in these districts, namely, Swadesh Bandhab Samiti, Brati Samiti, Dacca Anushilan Samiti, Suhrid Samiti and Sadhana Samiti. The towering figure of such variants of *Swadeshi*, who through his tireless effort made an all-encompassing applicability of its ideals possible, was a schoolmaster of Barisal Brajomohan Vidyalaya, Aswinikumar Dutt. From the 1880's, there had been a people's association which provided the basis of Dutt's work (Sarkar 1973: 290). His Swadesh Bandhab Samiti with its 159 branches could penetrate deep into the interior of the district because of his organizing capabilities. Volunteers of all these *Samitis* attended local *Melas* in large numbers mainly with the purpose of enforcing boycott through various indigenous, traditional, and vernacular mediums (Sarkar 1973: 291). Permanent committees for promotion of *Swadeshi* industries and agriculture, national education and arbitration courts, cooperative banks, *Dharmagolas* and sanitation measure

in the villages were parts of Dutt's definite blueprint. These districts of eastern Bengal became stronghold of Gandhians and their *Asramas* during and after the Non-Cooperation movement. Much of these institutions (to name a few; Khadi Pratisthan of Satish Chandra Dasgupta, Abhay Asram of Prafulla Chandra Ghosh and Suresh Chandra Banerji), modeled after Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram, sprung up during 1920's and 1930's. Inheriting the organizational and methodological apparatus left behind as a legacy by village level *Samitis* of *Swadeshi* days, these institutions played an active role in mobilizing and institutionalizing the Congress at the grass root level in eastern part of Bengal.

A fairly consistent and coherent set of reflections on an alternative socio-economic order represented by progressive rural communitarianism during the *Swadeshi* period found expression in Satish Chandra Mukherjee's essay, 'The Indian Economic Problem'. Satish Chandra Mukherjee, editor of the journal, the Dawn, was the only nationalist intellectual of his generation to raise his voice vehemently against large scale modern capitalist industry (Chandra 1999:166). He argued for a decentralized system of industrial production on a wide rural base which would be pillared on a system of improved family handicrafts. Large scale urban capitalist industries were not totally out of place in his argument but they, in his opinion, should be limited to a few sectors, owned, and operated by the state. Grants and aids, both financial and technical, were welcomed by him for improvement of rural agriculture and handicrafts. For this purpose, he voiced ardently the need of a proper technical and industrial education curriculum, corroborating with nation's socio-economic necessities. He genuinely advocated for a cooperative ethical life in a cooperative, structurally decentralized society, where material progress would be surpassed by spiritual and moral reform (Ganguli 1978: 95-9). Additional preservatives were later conjoined with this in Gandhian scheme of rural Constructive Work.

Following the sentimental approach of late nineteenth-century economic thought, handlooms became a dominant theme of newly emerging *Swadeshi* economy. It was in Hind Swaraj that Gandhi first time mentions ancient and sacred handlooms. Many caste weavers, who had previously abandoned their family occupation, returned to it during the days of *Swadeshi* movement which in turn provided impetus to the local handloom industry in some old bases, namely, Burdwan, Twenty-four Parganas, Nadia, Jessore (Bhattacharya 1986: 13). Thus, during *Swadeshi* period, in particular, the handloom became the concrete, material symbol of an imagined simplicity and purity of rural life, of folklore, of a distinctive Indian tradition, and of forms of life and remained sacred beyond the pale of the modern colonial rule (Bayly 1986: 297-8; Goswami 1998: 625). However, what antiquity it bore in this newborn sentiment for handlooms can be doubted as suggested by Tapan Raychaudhuri. He argued that the contact with the West and the colonial experience itself acted as a catalyst for our culture, giving rise to industries different from both the indigenous inheritance and the elements of western civilization (Raychaudhuri 1999: 99). Following this argument, it can be said that the goods like handlooms produced and promoted during the *Swadeshi* campaign were, thus, neither the products of India's

artisanal past, nor the products of the British colonial economy. Thus. *Khadi* which later became Gandhi's national emblem of unity was a new product of that particular wave. This period with this claim of legitimate antiquity, also witnessed the rise of a major concern for the status of the Indian craftsman. It was believed that the crafts in India could ultimately be revived to sustain the ideals of beauty and love and to serve the highest aims of religion and life, thereby connecting the project of artisanal rehabilitation to a high spiritual and ethical realm (Mathur 2011: 45-6). The product of artisan's labor was seen as the 'art of the masses' and as the foundation of good living of a truly civilized life by leading art critic and art reformer E. B. Havell. Finally in this conceptual evolution, the ultimate point of culmination came with Gandhi's powerful appropriation of the whole craftsman semiotic.

However, surprisingly, the nationalist demands of the *Swadeshi* period had been increasingly focused on the necessity of the state patronage towards indigenous enterprise. In order to combat the hegemony of the British capital, the nationalists proposed the protection of indigenous capital. Therefore, despite Gandhi's later conceptually radical reformulation, *Swadeshi* remained a movement for the nationalization of capital, not its abolition (Bhattacharya 1976: 1828-32; Goswami 1998: 628). Amit Bhattacharyya's point of departure formulates a critique because he says that only two things remained *Swadeshi* in this whole entrepreneurial endeavor: capital and members of the Board of Directors. Machineries and raw materials were very often imported (Bhattacharyya 1986: 45). Finally, the trend of Constructive *Swadeshi* seldom went beyond the boundaries of *bhadralok* movement. Change was more apparent than real as their attitude towards the Bengal's rural population showed a good deal of ambiguousness. This bewilderment was highly reflected in limitations of *Swadeshi* movement's agrarian programmes. These hindrances not only widened the gap instead of bridging it and were later inherited by Gandhian Constructive Work programme as well.

Conclusion:

The theoretical and practical apparatus for the future Gandhian philosophy and action in India was thus the fruit of the tree planted in nineteenth century colonial writings impregnated with the zeal of knowledge formation, late nineteenth and early twentieth century's anti-colonial thoughts and sentiments, and its final applied practice in the form of political endeavors of *Swadeshi* movement. Gandhi's *Khadi*, revival of village and cottage industries and Constructive Work programme including Basic National Education scheme of 1937 finally stroked the canvas of nationalist movement in India during 1920s and 30s. This phase included not only a promise for constitutional independence but a pledge for socio-economic independence. The latter was preached through a blueprint of moral uplift for village societies. Gandhi also used exhibitory and other indigenous vernacular propaganda mediums like his predecessors for accomplishing his coveted ends. The paradigm shift that he brought about in the scenario of India's nationalist movement,

from an elite-bourgeois activity directed at mobilizing the newly emerging middle classes to a popular movement with growing participation of the *mofussil* and village people from India's hinterlands could become a reality as a consequence of constant intermingling of all these elements by Gandhi. His charismatic traits laid in symbolic elements that he used, reused and reproduced ceaselessly in his writings, speeches, demonstrations and actions. Utilizing these emblematic constituents not only ensured a hegemonic position for the nationalist leadership over Gandhi's target section of population, hitherto untouched by any anti colonial sentiments, but could uphold unanimity of the nation too. In many instances, Gandhi's followers assimilated his philosophy of moral action with existing precursors. Nonetheless, they inherited these legacies along with their successes and failures which prevailed quite amply in their implicational contexts, varied regionally and locally as well.

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