Chapter 7
The Master of Masters: Mohandas Gandhi

There is no road to peace. Peace is the road (Gandhi).
The time has come for the master of masters, Gandhi.[1]

Gandhi is often portrayed as an 'idealist', particularly by 'realists' who hold military power, force, to be the ultimate mover in international relations, and in politics in general.

If we use the term 'idealist' not for abstention from violence, but for being driven by an idea, usually a simply, reductionist basic axiom, then this would fit the realist, and also quite a lot of idealists in the first sense.

But it does not fit Gandhi. His mind and actions were far too complex, holistic and woven into a complex Indian reality.

Rather, the 'realists' are in a tough spot, having only one remedy for a vast variety of problems: seek and destroy. They also have a tendency to disregard the two iron laws of violence:

[1] the victors will be stimulated to seek more victories;
[2] the vanquished will be stimulated to seek revenge.

Admittedly, those processes may take some time, making violence the approach of the short-sighted, out for a quick applause.

Thus, look at those two amateurs in politics at work: Lord Mountbatten, the Viceroy, and Sir Cyril Radcliffe. Look at Mountbatten urging Radcliffe to move the partition line so that the favorite, India, could have easy access to Kashmir. We know what happened. We know Gandhi's stand against partition. He lost; the Mountbattens won. But we were treated to the same sorry sight as in Israel-Palestine relations: After an enormous amount of patient nonviolent work on both sides (and here I include the *intifada*, by Middle East standards very soft), politician amateurs took over, building realism and spheres of interest into it via the 'Oslo process'. And with what result?

Fortunately, the English language makes a distinction between being a 'realist' and being 'realistic'. Maybe realism is its dark side and idealism its bright side. Gandhi certainly privileged the 'nonviolence of the brave' over and above violence. But he also privileged violence over the 'nonviolence of the coward', doing

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nothing, sitting on the fence, waiting, possibly the kind of 'nonviolence' that gives rise to the misnomer 'passive resistance' (probably invented by some 'realist'). Even a very cursory glance at Gandhi's masterpiece, a book destined to become a saving grace for this horrible century, his autobiography *My Experiments With Truth,* shows rather clearly that his resistance was rather active.

Thus, look at his life's political agenda:

[1] Struggle against *racism*, in South Africa
[2] Struggle for *independence*, *swaraj*
[3] Struggle against the *caste system*, for the *harijans*
[4] Struggle against *economic exploitation*, for *sarvodaya*
[5] Struggle against *communal strife,* for peace between Hindus/Muslims
[6] Struggle against *sexism*, for liberation of women
[7] Struggle for *nonviolent ways of struggling, satyagraha*.

Of eight fault-lines in the human construction, between humans and nature, between genders, between generations, between races, between castes and classes, between nations, between countries, Gandhi picked up six. Had he lived longer he would definitely have become and ardent environmentalist. Actually, in his action he was one, probably also in his thoughts, only his speech was less explicit. And generational divides he did not really touch. He was a good Hindu in that regard, honouring the *moksha* phase in this life, maybe also in his own.

This is a modern, even post-modern politician! This is not the usual compartmentalization of politics in race issues, anti-colonialism, anti-caste, anti-class, for communal harmony, for gender equality. His vision speaks through his life's work: *unity of humans*. But that means that he endowed some beings that had been deprived of that stamp with human quality: Indians in South Africa, the subjects of British colonialism, the untouchables, the *shudras*, those on the other side of the communal fence, the women. Please note: In the first two he also fights for himself, as an Indian in South Africa indeed identifying with his clients, and as a British colonial subject.

And then he spreads out, covering the field, now in a sense working against himself, the *vaishya*, the well positioned politically and economically, the Hindu, the man.

Of course this became too much, for some, for three, for one, for Godse; 50 years ago to the day of the murder, I am writing these lines. But I have a slightly different angle: What a miracle that the Master was given 78 years to teach and inspire us all. That in itself is a testimony to the strength of his nonviolence, in spite of the bullet that killed him in the end.

Godse's message was clear: India will be a better place without Gandhi. Godse wanted the same India as Nehru and his successors wanted: modern, industrial, armed, capable of military action. And the military even co-opted Gandhi's funeral procession. What a sacrilege, what a crime.

Photo 7.1 Johan Galtung. Photo is in possession of the author

Gandhi's message in his martyrdom was also clear: Here I failed? My nonviolence had not touched his heart. The rest of us may also draw another conclusion: His basic struggle was that uphill fight for a new way of struggling, his *satyagraha*.

Before looking at what happened to *satyagraha* after Gandhi, let us focus on one rather important point. Gandhi privileged the common man and woman in a dramatically inegalitarian society ridden by caste/class, and the common country

in a dramatically inegalitarian world ridden by colonialism. Somehow that highly realistic politician + saint found the key button to push for colonialism to 'dismantle' (Churchill's word, that 19th or 18th century figure that had been catapulted into the 20th century).

With India gone 15 August 1947 the British Empire was finished, the rest was some spasms of reactionary nostalgia. With British imperialism gone Western colonialism was finished, the rest until Portugal finally gave in can be characterized the same way.

Of course there were residues. One of them, Hong Kong, was 'handed over' 1 July 1997, close to 50 years after *swaraj*. And Prince Charles lost the opportunity for England, the West, to display the greatness of reflection: no word of sincere apology for the horrors of British imperialism in China, including drugging a whole nation. That apology would have brought applause, gratitude and good trade deals, but it never came.

To stand up for the common country and the common man and woman makes a person a saint. But it does not create followers among those who see themselves as (much) more common than others. Maybe we can say that after Gandhi's death India went back to normal. It is very hard to find any trace of Gandhism in Indian foreign policy. What can be found is a ritualistic administration of the memory of the great man in numerous institutes of Gandhian studies, adding little or nothing to the theory and practice of nonviolence, and not that much to our knowledge of Gandhi either. He remains his own best biographer.

But his greatness is not to be judged by his reception in his home country after he had delivered *swaraj* and became the Father of the Nation. Gandhi belongs to the world, as evidenced by the successes of nonviolence in the second half of this horribly violent century:

[1] the liberation of arrested Jews in Berlin, February 1943
[2] Gandhi's *swaraj* campaign in India; Independence from 1947
[3] Martin Luther King Jr.'s campaign in the US South from 1956
[4] the anti-Viet Nam war movement, inside and outside Viet Nam
[5] the Buenos Aires Plaza de Mayo mothers against the military
[6] the 'People's Power' movement in the Philippines, 1986
[7] the Children's Power movement in South Africa, from 1976
[8] the *intifadah* movement in Occupied Palestine, from 1987
[9] the democracy movement in Beijing, spring 1989
[10] the *Solidarnosc*/DDR movements which ended the Cold War.

More could have been added, but let us first make some short comments on some of the complexities of these ten cases:

[1] Many Jews returned to work after having been released and were re-arrested and killed in such a way that nonviolent action was much more difficult. Others were able to hide. Nonviolence is not a single-shot action.

[2] Britain was also weakened by World War II and the contradiction between fighting autocracy, yet hanging on to colonialism. Gandhi's action sharpened that contradiction.
[3] Official segregation has ended, while unofficial segregation remains, again an argument why nonviolence is a process, not a single-shot event.
[4] Basically the Vietnamese won a violent war, but the nonviolence probably weakened the resolve on the US side.
[5] Essentially leaderless, so the peace prize was given to an outstanding man instead (Alfonso de Esquivel).
[6] Probably more middle class than a movement of, for and by the really oppressed; so it should have been continued.
[7] To this could be added the moral impact of economic sanctions, divestment, and the positive example of Zimbabwe at the time.
[8] The action repertory of the movement included throwing stones, but the argument would be that by regional standards this is already nonviolent.
[9] Major violence was used by government forces, but probably against the workers trade union movement rather than against the student democracy movement.
[10] The fact that violence was used in Romania does not make the actions in Poland and the GDR less nonviolent. In Hungary the transformation was a conventional, slow political change, and transformations in Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria—not to mention the Soviet Union—can probably best be seen as domino effects from GDR and Poland. In GDR mass migration was a major nonviolent tactic. The nonviolent counter-coup in August 1991 in Moscow belongs here, but with some doubts: not because the Yeltsin counter-coup was not nonviolent, but because the coup itself may not have been credibly violent, but possibly staged (e.g., as a way of getting rid of Gorbachev, who at that time had dismantled the Soviet Empire, but not given into Western economic demands). The coup was amateurish and half-hearted.

To write the history of this violent century without also exploring its nonviolence, is to malign the century even further. Such negligence reveals considerable ideological bias and intellectual incompetence, widespread in "security studies."

Here is a list of ten basic mechanisms behind nonviolence:

[1] The threat of direct violence or the structural violence is intolerable to major groups in the country.
[2] A constructive alternative has been formulated and communicated to Other in speech, writing, demonstrations, etc.
[3] There is a clear and present danger that violence of some kind will be used if active nonviolence is practiced, in other words, a real risk to Self is involved.
[4] The commitment to nonviolence is clear, applying not only to acts, but also to speech, and, if possible, to thought.
[5] There are Self-to-Other acts of friendliness, love.

[6] Nonviolent action then serves to communicate, to Other and outsiders, that Self will never surrender to oppression, is willing to face the consequences, and wants a positive relation.
[7] Dissociation (non-cooperation and civil disobedience) from Other the oppressor and association with Other the person may then change the mind—and even the heart—of Other.
[8] If the oppressor uses violence to counter nonviolence, then demoralization of Other facing the consequences of his violence on nonviolent resisters may serve to change his mind.
[9] If Other uses long-distance violence, including economic boycott, to avoid facing the consequences, then outside parties must be mobilized to make the consequences clear to him.
[10] If the socio-psychological distance Self-Other is based on Other dehumanizing Self, then nonviolence may have to include outsiders in a Great Chain of Nonviolence. Some of the intermediaries will share many social characteristics with the oppressed; others will be socially closer to the oppressors. Gandhi mediated the nonviolence of the masses to their rulers.

Uppermost in the mind should be the three basic concerns of nonviolent action: That action is to be directed against the bad relation between Self and Other, not against Other as such; that action should build love rather than hatred, and peaceful rather than violent behaviour; and that Other is at all times invited to share this enriching experience—including assurances to Other that there is space for him in a future society. The point is to behave in such a way that the conflict becomes transformed upwards. The parties should emerge from the conflict not only with better social relations, but also as better persons than they were before, better equipped to take on new conflicts nonviolently. Those inclined to violence yesterday or today may thus become the mediators of tomorrow.

Of course this does not always work. Self may have the first six points under control, but then Other may fail to respond as hoped for in the next four points. One possibility is to try again; another is capitulation, which should never be viewed as permanent. To accept violence is in itself violence.

Gandhians would emphasize the role of greater purification of Self for conflict transformation to take place. This theory has the advantage of placing the burden on OneSelf and on something one can do (e.g., through meditation), and the additional advantage of being non-falsifiable ("There has been no change of heart in Other? You need more Self-purification!").

This factor should certainly not be excluded, as nonviolence so obviously does work spiritually, from spirit to spirit. But that should not exclude political work on, and with, outside parties. In mechanisms [9] and [10] above they are crucial.

At any rate, let nobody claim that no conflict exists—no matter how internalized the hatred, how institutionalized the violent behavior, and how intractable the contradiction, the incompatibility, the issue—that cannot be transformed through nonviolence. I am *not* saying *nonviolence always works*. There is no panacea

hypothesis. But many oppressed groups might have come much further toward autonomy had they used nonviolence.

The hypothesis that *violence never works* can be argued, however:

First: There are the number of people killed and bereaved; the number of people traumatized in body, mind and spirit, and those affected by that; the physical damage to human habitat and nature. Most of this harm is irreversible. And these are only the visible effects of violence, ignoring basic side-effects—like mainstream economists excluding externalities of economic action. Only by ignoring this vital point can the prophets of violence reach a positive conclusion as to the use of violence.

Second: If violence leads to change in Self-Other relations, then this is done by incapacitating Other. But an enforced outcome is not sustainable because it is not accepted, and is unacceptable because a defeated Other is no longer Other.

Third: There has been no positive transformation in Self, but even a negative transformation since a victory may trigger an addiction to violence, and lead to more violence next time.

Fourth: There has been no positive transformation of Other, but possibly a negative transformation since that defeat may also trigger an addiction to violence and lead to revenge, one barrier having been removed by having been the object of violence, so that there is no danger of incurring a moral deficit.

Hence the conclusion: Gandhi was so much more realistic.

And yet all that has just been said about nonviolence, the cases and the underlying assumptions, would today have been unthinkable without that Indian gift to humanity. His language, here softly translated for people of our times and maybe with social science inclinations, was spiritual, very far from the materialism and behaviorism of the "Skinner box," conditioning pigeons through the administration of shocks and sugar (translation: bombing and trade/aid). Maybe Gandhi simply had much more respect for human beings, and with that respect also made them worthy of his respect?

One thing is certain: Nonviolence as a key component in conflict transformation has come to stay. The main obstacle in the experience of this author is a macho/warrior logic defining violence as the male and heroic/courageous thing to do, seeing nonviolence as female. We are in the center of feminist critique of politics saying this; they have said it better than most. I remember being called as a mediator between Kurdish factions to the place used by the French presidency, Rambouillet Castle outside Paris, July 1994. The factions had been killing each other. But 200 Kurdish women had managed, nonviolently, to bring about a ceasefire. I urged the male negotiators to bring those women into the process, and by that suggestion managed to unify them. "We should fight like women? Imagine Kurdish women won with such nonviolence, what would then happen to us? We should live under the yoke of women leaders for the rest of our lives?"

I think this is where the debate is mainly located, not about efficacy. Gandhi knew that. To him women were the best *satyagrahi*. Also in that sense was he more modern than our tradition-driven politicians. And much, much more realistic.

Further Readings

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