



made, then where are we to go? Although I will miss no opportunity of settlement, still after having come to know the strength of India I am afraid of the settlement. What will be our condition if settlement is made before we have been thoroughly tested? It would be like that of a child prematurely born which will perish in a short time. In Portugal, the Government was changed in a moment as the result of a revolution, and in that country, new revolutions are constantly occurring, and no one constitution endures. In Turkey when all of a sudden the government was changed in the year 1909, congratulations came from all sides, but this was only a nine days' wonder. The change was like a dream. After that Turkey had to suffer much and who knows how much more suffering is still in store for that brave people. On account of this experience, I am often plunged in anxiety.<sup>45</sup>

Gandhi's programme for Indian regeneration was highly complex and involved a cluster of interrelated strategies of which cultivating the *swadeshi* spirit, *satyāgraha* and the Constructive Programme were the most important.<sup>46</sup> *Swadeshi*, a complex Hindu concept with a long history, had been revived and widely used since at least the Partition of Bengal in 1905. Gandhi took it over and so redefined it as to offer an Indian alternative to the European doctrine of nationalism.

For Gandhi every man was born and grew up in a specific community with its own distinct ways of life and thought evolved over a long period of time. The community was not a mere collection of institutions and practices but an ordered and well-knit whole informed by a specific spirit and ethos. It provided its members with an organised environment vital for their orderly growth, a ready network of supportive relationships, a body of institutions and practices essential for structuring their otherwise chaotic selves, foci for sentiments and loyalties without which no moral life was possible and a rich culture. In these and other ways it profoundly shaped their personalities, modes of thought and feeling, deepest instincts and aspirations and their innermost being. Every community in turn was inextricably bound up with a specific natural environment within which it had grown up, which had cradled and nursed it and in the course of interacting with which it had developed its distinctive customs, habits and ways of

life and thought. The natural environment was not external to it but integrated into its history and culture and suffused with its collective memories, images, hopes and aspirations. As Gandhi put it, a community's culture or way of life constituted its soul or spirit and its natural habitat its body. The two formed an indissoluble unity and the inescapable basis of human existence.

Gandhi used the term *Swadesh* to refer to this unity, *swa* meaning one's own and *desh* the total cultural and natural environment of which one was an inseparable part.<sup>47</sup> *Desh* was both a cultural and an ecological unit and signified the traditional way of life obtaining within a specific territorial unit. The territorial reference was as important as the cultural. *Desh* did not mean a state or a polity for a way of life might not be organised in such a manner; nor a mere piece of territory unless it was inhabited and culturally appropriated by a community of men sharing a common way of life; nor a cultural group unless it occupied a specific territorial unit and its cultural boundaries coincided with the territorial. The castes, religions and cultures constituting the Indian mosaic were not *deshas*; India, a civilisational-cum-territorial unit, uniting them all in terms of a common way of life was. In classical Indian political thought every territorial unit distinguished by a distinct way of life was called a *desh* and India was a *desh* composed of smaller *deshas*, each a distinct cultural and ecological unit but united with the others by a shared civilisation. Gandhi agreed except that he thought of the constituent units as *pradeshas* or subordinate or *quasi-deshas*.

The *swadeshi* spirit which Gandhi variously translated as the community, national or patriotic spirit or the spirit of nationality and sharply distinguished from nationalism, basically referred to the way an individual related and responded to his *desh*.<sup>48</sup> Since he was profoundly shaped by and unintelligible outside it, he should accept the inescapable fact that it was the necessary basis and context of his existence and that he owed his humanity to it. He should show a basic existential loyalty and gratitude to it and accept his share of the responsibility to preserve its integrity. He should recognise himself as an heir to the countless generations of men and women whose efforts and sacrifices made it what it is and cherish his heritage in the spirit of familial piety.<sup>49</sup> Even as he inherits his physical features, bodily constitution and natural endowments and should accept them as facts of life without a sense of shame or arrogance, he inherits his *desh* with all its strengths and



limitations and should accept it without self-glorification or self-pity. This did not mean that he should turn a blind eye to or remain uncritical of its limitations any more than self-respect implied indifference to one's weaknesses. Gandhi insisted that since a man imbued with the *swadeshi* spirit loved his community and wanted it to flourish and realise its full potential, he could never be insensitive to its limitations; on the contrary, he was intensely alert to them lest they should cause its degeneration and decline. His was, however, not the criticism of an indifferent or hostile outsider only interested in denigrating or making fun of it, but of one who passionately cared for his community and intuitively understood and accepted responsibility for it. He sought to change it not because he was in love with some other to which he wanted it to conform, but because he wanted it to be true to itself and knew that it had the resources to become better. Gandhi's reaction to Katherine Mayo's highly vituperative *Mother India* was a good example of what he meant by the *swadeshi* spirit. He called it a gutter inspector's report which the British rulers should forget but the Indians should always remember.

For Gandhi the *swadeshi* spirit extended to all the elements composing the *desh* and implied a love of not only the traditional way of life but also the natural environment and especially the people sharing it. The integrity of a way of life was inextricably bound up with that of its ecological context and could not be preserved without preserving the latter. A man who claimed to love his *desh* but saw nothing wrong in savagely altering its environment and disrupting its unity was profoundly inconsistent and lacking in the *swadeshi* spirit. The *swadeshi* spirit also required that he should be passionately concerned with the way the other members of his community lived. They were an integral part of his *desh* and bound to him by the deepest bonds. To love his *desh* was to love them. He should therefore identify himself with them, especially the least privileged who most need his attention, eschew comforts and privileges unavailable to them, buy locally produced in preference to foreign goods likely to throw them out of work, and in general do all in his power to create and sustain a decent existence for them. For Gandhi the *swadeshi* spirit was not a sentimental attachment to an abstraction called India or Britain but an active love of the men and women sharing and sustaining a way of life, and had a moral, economic and political content. A man who loved Indian food, customs, traditions and way of life but

remained indifferent to the plight of the people who collectively made all these possible was guilty of moral hypocrisy and gravely deficient in the *swadeshi* spirit.<sup>50</sup>

For Gandhi the *swadeshi* spirit did not imply indifference let alone hostility to other *deshas*. As a moral being every individual had a duty to be deeply interested in the problems faced by people in other communities. And even as he cared for his *desh* he had a duty to do all he could to preserve the integrity of their ways of life. Gandhi was, however, deeply wary of abstract internationalism. Every man was a part of a specific community which he understood better than he did others and whose members had a prior though not exclusive claim on him. They must therefore remain his primary though not sole concern. Gandhi thought that some form of moral division of labour was inescapable and that each community must look after its own members. He did not see why that should ever lead to the exploitation of or even conflicts of interests with other communities. The earth provided 'enough for everybody's needs but not enough for anybody's greed'. Unless a community demanded more than its legitimate share of the earth's resources, no conflict of interests need occur. Gandhi distinguished between self-interest and selfishness. The former referred to legitimate needs, that is, to those material and other opportunities all men needed in order to realise their human potential and to which they were entitled to make legitimate claims; the latter referred to illegitimate greed, that is, to those opportunities that far exceeded the level of legitimate needs, could not be universalised and could only be secured at the expense of others. The *swadeshi* spirit sanctioned legitimate self-interest but not selfishness.

Gandhi used the term *swarāj* to describe a society run in the *swadeshi* spirit.<sup>51</sup> It meant self-rule or autonomy and implied not only formal independence but also cultural and moral autonomy. A culturally parasitic community living in the shadow of and constantly judging itself by the standards of another might be independent but it lacked integrity, *swadeshi* spirit and *swarāj*. As Gandhi put it, under *swarāj* a community lived by its own truth. It conducted its affairs in the light of its traditions and values while remaining fully alert to their limitations and ready to learn from others. It was both rooted and open, the two ideas recurring with great regularity in his writings. If a society was not rooted, it was swept off its feet by every passing fashion and remained chaotic. If it was not open, it lacked 'fresh air', smelt stale and decayed.



Hence Gandhi often compared *swarāj* to a house with its windows and doors open. One cannot live in the open, but one cannot live in a closed house either. As the *Rigvedic* prayer Gandhi was fond of quoting put it, 'may the noble winds from all over the world blow into our house.'

The *Satyāgraha* was the second important constituent of Gandhi's programme of national self-purification. Since we shall discuss it at length later, we shall only comment here on one relevant aspect of it. When he started campaigning against the racially discriminatory laws in South Africa, Gandhi discovered that his countrymen there lacked personal and communal self-respect, courage and the willingness to organise themselves. In a memorable phrase he urged them to 'rebel' against themselves and warned them that, if they behaved like worms, they should not blame others for trampling on them. It was in this context that he had hit on the method of *satyāgraha*. 'The purpose of *satyāgraha* is to instil courage into people and make them independent in spirit'. On his return to India he found that the problems were even more acute. On the one hand the colonial government was firmly entrenched, arrogant, heavily armed and not at all like the weak governments of Natal and the Transvaal. On the other hand the Indians were much more divided and weak and just as deficient in courage, self-respect, personal and collective discipline and the spirit of self-sacrifice. He seems to have felt that the method he had developed in South Africa was inadequate and needed a radical revision. Non-violence could not be practised by cowards lacking the courage to hit back. Gandhi wondered how courage, manliness, self-discipline and pride could be cultivated among Indians and toyed with the idea of military training. Since the soldier possessed all the qualities he was looking for, he thought that if Indians received military training they too could cultivate them.<sup>52</sup> Even as 'you cannot make a dumb man appreciate the beauty and the merit of silence', you cannot 'teach *ahimsā* to a man who cannot kill'. He went on, 'It may look terrible but it is true that we must, by well-sustained conscious effort, regain this power [to kill] and then, if we can only do so, deliver the world from its travail of *himsā* by a continuous abdication of this power.'<sup>53</sup> Gandhi even thought that war was not an unmitigated evil and had a vital role to play in the development of national character. He realised that his 'terrible discovery' involved him in a contradiction. As a votary of

non-violence he wanted his countrymen to fight non-violently, yet he wanted them to undergo a training in violence in order to acquire the required virtues! He appreciated too that war and military training were fraught with dangerous consequences including the fact that once a man was taught to kill he did not fancy dying without a good fight. Not surprisingly Gandhi felt utterly confused and complained to a close friend that the 'hard thinking' he had been doing was wrecking his health.<sup>54</sup>

After considerable reflection he concluded that, if properly re-fashioned, the method of *satyāgraha* he had discovered in South Africa provided the answer. It had all the advantages and none of the disadvantages of military training and cultivated 'manliness in a blameless way'. It could be conducted at various levels and with varying degrees of intensity, it made flexible demands on the participants ranging from attendance at a protest meeting to the sacrifice of life, women and even children could participate in it and acquire the desired qualities, it relied on the strength of numbers which India had in plenty, and it could easily be withdrawn if found to be getting nowhere. Again it required courage, but not of the heroic kind. It often involved injury, but not necessarily death, and the courage it required was based on the quiet obstinacy and tenacity of purpose characteristic of Indians, especially the rural masses. The *satyāgraha* had the further advantage that it 'never failed'. Since it did not threaten the government, it denied the latter the excuse to use indiscriminate and massive force that would easily frighten and demoralise a nervous and long-suppressed people. If the government did become brutal, it forfeited domestic and international good will; if it gave in, the masses gained a sense of power. As Gandhi put it the *satyāgraha* was a 'trump-card' and particularly suited to India. As he put it after his first *satyāgraha* in India, he did not tell the people involved that they were about to stage one; he led the protest along the lines they were used to and told them later that they had in fact launched a *satyāgraha*. Gandhi's method of *satyāgraha* was a fascinating example of the *swadeshi* spirit. Instead of making excessive demands and lambasting his countrymen for lacking certain abstractly desirable qualities of character, he gratefully accepted and built on those they had in plenty. And rather than lament their incapacity to conform to an ideally desirable method of political action, he took over and subtly transformed their accustomed forms of protest.<sup>55</sup>



The third element in Gandhi's strategy of national regeneration was what he called the Constructive Programme.<sup>56</sup> It was 'designed to build up the nation from the very bottom upward' and regenerate India's society and economy. It was a mixed bag of such 'absolutely essential' 18 items as Hindu-Muslim unity, the removal of untouchability, a ban on alcohol, the use of khadi, the development of village industries and craft-based education. It also included equality for women, health education, the use of indigenous languages, the adoption of a common national language, economic equality and trusteeship, building up peasants' and workers' organisations, integration of the tribal people into mainstream political and economic life, a detailed code of conduct for students, helping lepers and beggars and cultivating respect for animals.

Although some of these items were rather trivial and did not measure up to the gravity of the situation, none was without value. For example, the use of *khādi* was intended to provide a national uniform and create at least a measure of outward equality in a highly unequal society, to introduce simplicity in an ostentatious society, to generate a sense of solidarity with the poor, to bring economic pressure on the British government and to reduce foreign imports. The use of regional languages was intended to bridge the vast and widening chasm between the masses and the Westernised elite, to ensure cultural continuity, encourage authenticity of thought and action and to forge indigenous tools of collective self-expression. The development of village industries was intended to help the poor in the villages, to guarantee them not only a livelihood but also employment, to arrest migration to the cities and, above all, to sustain what Gandhi took to be the necessary social and geographical basis of Indian civilisation. Some of the other items were more important and urgent, but Gandhi had little to say that was original or likely to yield the desired results. For example, he naïvely thought that Hindu-Muslim unity could be brought about by 'personal friendship' and each refraining from doing whatever was likely to offend the other. For many years he also thought that untouchability could be eradicated by propaganda and personal example, and that poverty could be removed by persuading the rich to look on themselves as trustees of their property.

Although several items in the Constructive Programme had only a limited practical impact, its symbolic and pedagogical value was

considerable. First, for the first time during the struggle for independence, Indians were provided with a clear, albeit limited, statement of social and economic objectives. Second, they were specific and within the range of every one of them. In a country long accustomed to finding plausible alibis for inaction, Gandhi's highly practical programme had the great merit of ruling out all excuses. Third, his constant emphasis on it reminded the country that political independence had no meaning without comprehensive national regeneration, and that all political power was ultimately derived from a united and disciplined people. Finally, the Constructive Programme enabled Gandhi to build up a dedicated group of grass-roots workers capable of mobilising the masses.

As Gandhi understood them *satyāgraha* was primarily concerned with the moral and political, and the Constructive Programme with the social and economic regeneration of India, and the *swadeshi* spirit was the overarching principle inspiring and guiding them. The 'diseased' and weak India required a drastic 'medicine' and a rigorous programme of 'body building', and Gandhi thought that his tripartite prescription provided both. 'He is a true physician who probes the cause of disease, and if you pose as a physician for the disease of India, you will have to find out its true cause.'<sup>57</sup> Dr Gandhi fancied himself as a national physician who had accurately diagnosed India's disease and knew how to restore it to health and build up its strength.

For nearly 30 years Gandhi devoted all his energies to the implementation of his master plan. He knew what he needed and set about achieving it. He required a powerful and united team of men and women with complementary talents, and skilfully identified, nurtured and welded them. He needed a journal to carry his message in his own words, and so he started and edited one himself. He required funds, and so he discovered, cultivated and shrewdly managed India's half dozen richest industrialists. He needed to awaken and unite his countrymen, and so he initiated a series of well-phased and well-planned *satyāgrahas*, each mobilising a clearly targeted constituency. He needed a mass following which he secured by transforming his way of life and evolving an easily comprehensible and highly evocative mode of symbolic discourse. No other leader before him had worked out such a clear and comprehensive strategy for tackling India's problems, and none possessed either his massive self-confidence or his skill in



developing the indispensable organisational and communicational tools. It was hardly surprising that Gandhi should have exercised unparalleled influence on Indian political life for nearly a quarter of a century.

### 3

## Philosophy of Religion

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Although Gandhi grew up in a devout and educated Vaishnavite family, his knowledge of Hinduism was extremely limited. He had learnt little Sanskrit, was innocent of Hindu philosophy and had not even read the *Gita* until persuaded to do so in England by two theosophists. It was only when he went to South Africa that he began to take serious intellectual interest in Hinduism. As he admitted to a lay preacher, 'I am a Hindu by birth. And yet I do not have much knowledge of where I stand and what I do or should believe and intend to make a careful study of my own religion.' His employer Abdulla Sheth pressed Islam on his attention, and he read the Koran and several commentaries on it. Finding that he was troubled by and unable to offer a coherent defence of his religious beliefs, some of his enthusiastic Christian contacts sought to convert him. Gandhi dutifully read all the books they gave him, even attended the church and participated in discussions on the comparative merits of the two religions. The book that most impressed him was Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You* before whose 'independent thinking, profound morality and truthfulness' all other religious books 'seemed to pale into insignificance'. The three qualities he found in Tolstoy's book give a fairly good idea of what he then and all his life looked for in a religion. Although deeply impressed by Christianity, Gandhi remained 'utterly' unpersuaded by it. As he put it,

My difficulties went deeper. I could not swallow the belief that Jesus Christ alone was the son of God and that only those believing in him could attain salvation. If God could have Sons, then we are all His sons. If Jesus was like God or indeed God himself, every man is like God and can become God. The intellect simply cannot literally accept the view that the sins of the world can be washed away by the death or blood of Jesus, although metaphorically the view may contain truth. Again,