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# Foundations of a Political Identity: An Inquiry into Indian Swaraj (Self-Rule)

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CLAREMONT MCKENNA COLLEGE

**Foundations of a Political Identity: An Inquiry into Indian Swaraj (Self-Rule)**

SUBMITTED TO

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for

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## Chapter 1- The Crisis

### **Introduction**

"If a modern Diogenes were to hunt out for Indians with his lantern in these days, he would be sure to come across fervid Hindus, bigoted Muslims and fanatical souls deeply engrossed with the problem of tirelessly finding out how unjustly their own particular community was being treated, and he would have to ask in sorrow: 'Where are the Indians?' "

- Syed Abdullah Brelvi. <sup>1</sup>

### ***Assessment of Indian Democracy: Indian Civilization's Problem***

When India gained independence in 1947, it consisted of 550 independent states with 350 million people who spoke more than two-dozen different languages and who had a myriad of religious affiliations. Due to this exceptional diversity many observers doubted India's ability to survive as one political nation state. The odds against establishing a stable political state were further compounded by the ravage massacre of the partition that killed a million people, displaced another 13 million people and resulted in economic losses of billions of rupees. It seemed that an attempt at an Indian union would fail and that the subcontinent would disintegrate into many states.

However, when it comes to political unity, Indian democracy has not only survived, but it has flourished. India has managed to consistently conduct fair elections of gigantic proportions. At present India is in the middle of conducting the largest democratic exercise in history, where 815 million people are eligible to vote, a number

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<sup>1</sup> Guha, Ramchandra . "The Good Indian." *The Hindu* 15 Feb. 2009: n. pag. Print.

bigger than the entire population of Europe. India has also had very limited issues with the transfer of power between leaders. This is especially commendable considering how many countries formed in the post colonial period have consistently had issues with military coups and the establishment of functioning democracies. A prime example of this is India's volatile neighbor, Pakistan that was carved out of the former British India at the same time as India. Pakistan has been under military rule for 32 years of its 67 years of independence, facing constant tensions between the military and the civil government. While in India a culture of democracy has flourished, in Pakistan democracy has remained stillborn. Furthermore even the threats that Indian democracy has faced, especially during the time of Emergency in the 1970s, have been decisively defeated by the Indian voter. By ensuring the freedom of press, granting basic civil liberties and establishing institutions that check power, Indian has sustained a democracy that maintains its political unity and provides to a certain degree freedom of mind to its people.

There is, however one major issue that is starting to gravely undermine Indian democracy despite its reasonable success. This problem is not new; rather it stems from India's inherent social diversity. In-fact as Tagore points out the main issue of Indian civilization from the beginning of her history is not political but social in nature; it's the race problem. India has been the melting pot for diverse ethnicities for centuries. From the conquering Aryans to the local Dravidians, from the warring Greeks to the trading Jews, from the victorious Mughals to the refuge-seeking Parsi-Zoroastrians, India has provided its material riches and spiritual solace to all. Numerous foreign invasions and India's central role in world trade, has brought it in touch with different races. All these

factors have made it pertinent for India to embark on a quest to understand how people with different social, religious and cultural practices can live together. This is unlike the West, where people were able to segregate into different ethnic groups, eventually forming different Nation-States with unique central identities for their citizens. Therefore European history became more about political identity, about the rise and fall of kingdoms, about fights for political freedom and supremacy. India's history, on the other hand, has been the story of continual social adjustment. As Tagore puts it, "her (India's) mission has been like that of a hostess to provide proper accommodation to her numerous guests whose habits and requirements are different from one another. It is giving rise to infinite complexities whose solution depends not merely upon tactfulness but sympathy and true realization of the unity of man" (Tagore 4).

While India made some strides through social recognition of differences and through spiritual recognition of unity, it was not able to completely address its race problem. In-fact it even exacerbated the problem by creating rigid social institutions that made intellectual development stagnant, making India ripe for economic exploitation through colonialism. Even in 1947, when India got its political independence from the British, this problem was a major cause for concern. It was the reason why the world thought that India could not survive as a modern nation-state. While fortunately India not only survived but also to a certain degree thrived as a nation-state, it has still after 67 years of independence, been unable to solve this problem inherent in the Indian civilization. Indian democracy, despite its best intentions, has been unable to provide an effective common political platform that is equally accessible to various communities: a platform that is fundamental to the fair workings of a modern democratic nation-state.

This inability to provide a common political platform has led to an undercurrent of social unrest and disharmony. While social unrest has been a constant feature of the Indian polity since independence, recent Indian political history has made the problem more lethal. It now has the potential of gravely undermining India's political stability and causing it to disintegrate into various hostile fragments, just like the world predicted in 1947. The reason why India's social problem has taken almost 70 years to become a potential threat again, is because of two main reasons: the disappearance of certain political platforms that briefly united India's diverse communities and the onset of free market capitalism that has resulted in stronger regional and religious associations that are harmful to the larger national identity.

### ***India's Short Lived Political Identities***

One reason why India's race problem has not been resolved and has made a strong reappearance is India's short lived political identities. The political platforms that united India for a long time were unsustainable in the long run and never directly addressed India's deep-rooted social problems. They just diverted attention by grounding themselves on external political factors and entities. For a long time, during and after independence, Indians based their political identity in contrast to an external political entity. During the independence movement when the Indians united to fight against the yoke of foreign oppression, their national political platform was Anti-British or Anti-Colonialism. This remained the prevalent Indian political identity briefly after independence, slowly diminishing in importance but always remaining a constant underlying basis on which Indians first established their nation-state. In-fact to a certain



degree it facilitated India's political and social ideology for the next few decades.

Ideologically India aligned itself with socialist Soviet Union, basing its political platform on being Anti-West and Anti-Capitalism. Perhaps though, the political platform that truly united India for decades was based on the rivalry with its contrasting neighbor, Pakistan.

From the onset of the bloody creation of the two states to the numerous territorial disputes that have resulted in four full-scaled wars, India and Pakistan's relationship has been full of animosity and suspicion of the other side. Ideologically, the two nations were established to juxtapose each other, to provide separate national identities for its majority population. The two-nation theory was based on the idea that Hindus and Muslims were separate nationalities, that a Hindu majority India would not be a safe place for the Muslims and therefore Muslims needed a separate nation to contrast a Hindu-nation. This ideological creation itself pitted the neighbors against each other, leading them to join separate political camps. Despite the cultural similarities and the common historical heritage, Pakistan and India took two very different paths to the creation and functioning of their respective nation-states, often engaging in military and ideological confrontation. This allowed Indians to base their national identity in contrast to that of Pakistan: Indians united by being Anti-Pakistan.

In spite their relative strength and efficacy, these common political platforms have been unsustainable due to their dependence on external factors. The external environment is susceptible to constant change, which would require a constant renovation of the common national identity, making the whole process cumbersome and ineffective in the long run. A nation-state cannot hope to survive if its existence and the identity of its people are derived from a source that it has no control over. This issue is clearly

evident in the India of today. Over the past few decades, India's association with the world has evolved. In 1991 India opened its markets and slowly started adopting capitalism. Over the next two decades, India's economic growth and its status as the world's largest democracy propelled the nation to the world's center stage. Soon the distrustful relationship with the West turned into a more strategic economic partnership. India started embracing Western culture and economic ideology: it stopped being Anti-West. In the same period, as India found its niche in the larger world stage, its relationship with Pakistan became less confrontational. There were still disputes regarding state-sponsored terrorism and territorial access, but due to the nuclear armament of both nations, these disputes did not escalate into full-scale war. Furthermore while India was being proclaimed as the new 21<sup>st</sup> century super-power, Pakistan was involved in its own internal conflicts that crippled its economy and its government, urging many observers to label it as a fail state. This drastic change in fortunes has made Indians view their erratic neighbor differently. For India it is no longer about competing with Pakistan, but just being cautious about its state and non-state actions. This has also diluted the common political identity that Indians invoked through their external neighbor: Indians stopped being Indians only because they were Anti-Pakistan.

### ***Capitalism and its Impact on National Identity***

Another reason for strong recurrence of India's social problem is the advent of Capitalism in India. In recent history, the political and economic discourse in India has shifted. While it still mainly revolves around issues of economic development and growth, there is an apparent shift in the solutions discussed, with business and capitalism

taking center stage. In the early decades socialist 5-year plans enacted and executed by the state were meant to foster development, but now the focus has shifted towards private enterprise and the opening up of the economy to foster growth. Capitalism and the potential it holds in creating wealth have captured India's imagination. The fact that within a short span of two decades, economic liberalization has propelled the country onto the global stage has only reaffirmed the value of capitalism and has invoked in Indians a desire to create wealth.

Capitalism however has not been conducive to the creation of a national identity. Unlike the United States, India has not been able to combine common political notions of freedom and liberty with Capitalism. Capitalism has become a tool for an individual, usually the elite, to grow wealthy and powerful. It has not necessarily been an economic movement where the masses have gained greater economic freedom and prosperity. For example, since the economic reforms of 1991, income inequality has almost doubled in India with almost 42% of its population living under the poverty line.<sup>2</sup> In short, India has adopted Capitalism without necessarily imbibing the values of Capitalism that make it a fair and effective system for the commonweal.

This is problematic because one of the main tenants of the free market system is competition: competition among individuals for limited resources. The rules of competition are established universally, usually through a national consensus that would be in sync with their national identity. A lack of a common national identity makes it hard to establish common rules. While theoretically rules of competition exist in India,

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<sup>2</sup> "India income inequality doubles in 20 years, says OECD." *BBC* 7 Dec. 2011: n. pag. Print.

the right spirit and values accompanying the rules are missing, making the rules ineffective and hard to enforce. This has led to what the Economist calls, “Crony Capitalism,” where corruption and “rent-seeking” through political connections becomes a method of succeeding and making money.<sup>3</sup> This advent of Crony Capitalism and the lack of a common national identity have forced people to strengthen their associations with their historical social identities. Every individual wants a share of the limited natural resources and wants to grow wealthy and powerful. In an environment where the common basic rules of engagement are unclear, the individual forms groups for the purpose of safety and prosperity. Factions are easiest to form around social identities, especially if the association with these identities is strong and deep-rooted. This idea is further compounded in India by the fact that society especially commerce, functioned under the law of hereditary. So economic associations and inter-dependence within communities were extremely strong. Therefore the competition between individuals under fair conditions now becomes a competition between different groups and communities with unclear rules of engagement, under a system of Crony Capitalism. This is what has happened in India and this threatens to disintegrate India’s political unity.

***Present Problems: Factionalism and Ineffective Democracy***

Short-lived national political identities based on external factors, and the onset of an exploitative economic system like Capitalism without its basic rules and values, undermine India’s political identity in two interconnected ways: by creating factionalism

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<sup>3</sup> "The new age of crony capitalism." *The Economist* 15 Mar. 2014: n. pag. Print.

and by making democracy ineffective. Factionalism occurs because people start associating more closely with identities related to religion, caste, region, class, sex, etc. They start preferring some of these identities over their other identities especially the political identity that relates to the larger nation. As discussed above, national identities cannot be sustained solely through external political entities. Therefore a lack of an explicit understanding of what innately makes one Indian contributes to this factionalism. It is much easier to associate with identities that one can observe around them rather than some theoretical notions of nationhood, especially when they are not made explicit. Furthermore as discussed, the advent of Crony Capitalism where the focus is on competition and exploitation of limited resources, has forced people to form factions for mutual safety and prosperity.

The problem with the creation of these factions is that they start developing animosity towards one another. These tensions rise not only because of economic reasons but also because of social and religious differences, which are made more explicit through the creation of these factions. And this animosity often has the potential to turn violent. A prime example of this in India is the Kashmir dispute, which highlights complicated religious, social and economic tensions between various groups of people. There are also cases of various minor and major insurgencies of people rising up against the country and demanding certain rights. Some of these have been based on region such as the North-East insurgency, or religion such as the Khalistan movement in Punjab, or economics such as the Naxalite-Maoist insurgency in Central India. These have turned violent, resulting in the death of thousands of people. For example the Maoist violence has resulted in the death of more than 10,000 people and has displaced approximately 12

million people<sup>4</sup>. Factionalism has also resulted in numerous riots. The most famous of these are the riots that erupted across India after the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992, or the Godhra riots that took place in 2002. Factionalism has created social tension that has resulted in violence and has undermined the notion of the larger nation of India. It has focused on identity of difference, where people are pitted against each other, undermining the larger political identity they all share in common.

Factionalism has had an adverse impact on the functioning of democracy. Apart from creating social unrest, it has also undermined the efficacy and fairness of the democratic process and the institutions of democracy. Stronger identification with smaller communities has led to political factionalism that gives preference to narrow group interests over larger national interests. While it is important to understand the concerns and the interests of every group, a minority or a majority, I also think that the larger interests of society are fundamentally more important. In a capitalist democracy fractured by factionalism, group interests are being given higher preference at the cost of other equally, if not more important societal interests. This has adverse effects when it starts manifesting in political discourse and public policy, as has been the case in India.

Different political parties in India have sought to represent the interests of various groups, leading to what experts call “vote-bank” politics. Vote-bank politics is the practice of maintaining voting blocks who vote for certain candidates on the basis of narrow communal considerations such as religion, caste, region among other things. Vote-bank politics is divisive in nature as it pits the interests of one community against

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<sup>4</sup> Garda , Imran. "India's Silent War." *Aljazeera* 21 Oct. 2011: n. pag. Print.

the other. Usually political candidates run for office on the platform of policies that might benefit certain communities over others. For example, it is very common in India to run on the platform of reservation, where candidates promise reservation of government jobs or university seats for a minority community to get their vote in the election. Such politics is inimical to a democracy. It undermines the larger interests of the country.

Furthermore it has led to a divisive political climate where the institutions of democracy have been abused to make the Indian system inefficient and stagnant. Different regional parties with different agendas start competing for the limited national resources, making national consensus harder to achieve. This is aptly demonstrated by the functioning of the Indian parliament in the recent past. In 2013, the Indian Parliament lost 1000 working hours due to disruptions caused by Parliamentarians standing up on various issues<sup>5</sup>. Each hour lost not only results in monetary loss (Rs. 2.5 million <sup>6</sup>), but it also leads to a decline in parliamentary debate and in the passage of parliamentary bills. For example Question Hour, the hour meant to raise questions on particular bills, was conducted for only 13% of the scheduled times in the Lok Sabha (Lower House) and 29% in the Rajya Sabha (Upper House).<sup>7</sup> In-fact for the first time in history, last year the Rajya Sabha (Upper House) returned the Union Budget Bill without any debate.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore the Parliament experienced its lowest point this February when

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<sup>5</sup> "Parliament lost over 1,000 hours due to disruptions: Report." *DNA* 18 Dec. 2013: n. pag. Print.

<sup>6</sup> VK, Vinod. "Dangerous decline of Parliament's role in India." *Indian Express* 18 Dec. 2013: n. pag. Print.

<sup>7</sup> VK, Vinod. "Dangerous decline of Parliament's role in India." *Indian Express* 18 Dec. 2013: n. pag. Print.

<sup>8</sup> PARSAL, GARGI. "Rajya Sabha approves Budget without debate." *The Hindu* 22 Mar. 2013: n. pag. Print.

pandemonium broke out in the Parliament with its Members turning riotous and brandishing pepper spray, knives and other weapons.<sup>9</sup> Most worryingly a divisive political climate, created by the emergence of political factionalism, has led to more acrimony between the various groups. It has led to more hate based campaigns as can be seen by the present national elections, which has been extremely vitriolic in terms of the language and the threats used by different candidates. Every day reports appear of different leaders indulging in “hate speeches” against certain communities to court their personal vote-banks.<sup>10</sup>

Divisive and communal politics has only heightened tensions between various groups and communities. It has perpetuated a cycle of hatred, where factionalism leads to political factionalism that makes democratic institutions ineffective, further intensifying factionalism that breeds hatred and undermines larger notions of a national identity. Usually the challenges of a democracy are the adoption of a workable system, the conduct of free and fair elections, the generation of voter interest and participation and its protection from the anarchists, the dictators and the military regimes. A great democracy like India shows that after these challenges are conquered, the greatest threat to a democracy is itself; democracy’s greatest challenge is to protect it from itself. To protect itself, India has to protect the sanctity of its Parliament from its Parliamentarians, it has to safeguard public interests from the vested interests of those people who claim to represent public interest, it has to save its citizens from its many people. The pertinent

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<sup>9</sup> Agarwal, Vibhuti. "Violence Erupts in India Parliament." *Wall Street Journal* 13 Feb. 2014: n. pag. Print.

<sup>10</sup> Umur, Baba. "Getting away with hate speeches in India." *Aljazeera* 24 Apr. 2014: n. pag. Print.



question is how can India protect its Republic? This is challenging because the cornerstone of the Indian Republic, Democracy itself is facing a crisis that makes it ineffective as a tool to redress India's problem. This problem is further compounded by the lack of an explicit Indian national identity that could have provided Indian Democracy the fundamental grounding to resolve its crisis. The purpose of this paper is to find a way to make the Indian national identity more explicit so that the present crisis of the Indian Democracy can be resolved.

### **Epistemological Crisis**

Indian Democracy's ineffectiveness according to me is India's present day "epistemological crisis"<sup>11</sup>. Scottish philosopher, Alasdair MacIntyre describes an "epistemological crisis" as "a state affecting the consciousness of either an individual or culture, wherein existing epistemologies, or ways of knowing, no longer seem adequate to accurately comprehend or describe the world." India's political crisis is that the exercise of democracy, the very foundation of the Indian union, is potentially undermining the union. The solution to any political problem would be the usage of democracy. But when the usage of democracy, the tool itself becomes a problem then the consequences can be catastrophic. This is the crisis that India is facing and it is apparent in all the protests that have recently taken place; protests against laws and government institutions that do not actually focus on any solutions. In-fact the present popularity of

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<sup>11</sup>Alisdair MacIntyre "EPISTEMOLOGICAL CRISES, DRAMATIC NARRATIVE AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE", *The Monist*, Vol. 60, No. 4, Historicism and Epistemology (OCTOBER, 1977), pp. 453-472

Narendra Modi, an authoritarian and divisive figure known for his Hindutva links, in the ongoing national election highlights Indian's growing frustration with the democratic process. Recent polls have even shown that many Indians prefer dictatorship to democracy.<sup>12</sup> Vested interests have abused democracy so much that it has become ineffective for the commonweal. Due to abuse, the existing "way of knowing" (democracy) has become inadequate in solving India's social problems.

MacIntyre goes on to argue that to survive such a crisis and to avoid tragedy, a tradition must undergo an "epistemological break": "a reconfiguration of epistemology such that new ways of knowing and new pieces of knowledge come into proper alignment with one another" (Vajpeyi 4). According to MacIntyre the break for European science in the 17<sup>th</sup> century came through Galileo's revolutionary text, *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems* (Ptolemaic and Copernican). Ananya Vajpeyi in her book, *The Righteous Republic* argues that Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* addressed a similar crisis that Indian political traditions were facing in the early 1900's. She argues that "What Galileo was to the European scientific tradition, Gandhi was to the Indian political tradition: not so much an inventor or a discoverer as the first one to see that new historical circumstances necessitated new ways of being in the world, new ways of processing what was known, and new strategies for coping with what was still unknown" (Vajpeyi 4). *Hind Swaraj*, which translates into Indian Self-Rule, was "Gandhi's meditation on India's self and India's sovereignty, without which it is not possible to imagine how he would have gone on to lead India to freedom from colonial rule"(Vajpeyi

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<sup>12</sup> Ghosh, Paramita. "Young India irony: 75% will vote but 52% support dictatorship." *Hindustan Times* 5 Aug. 2013: n. pag. Print.

5).

Ananya Vajpeyi goes on to point out that Swaraj, the term used by Gandhi, became the primary demand and focus of the freedom movement. It literally means “Self-Rule”: the rule by the self or the rule over the self, where the both the object and the subject of the “Rule” (Raj) is the self (Swa). Vajpeyi argues that the “raj” part of Swaraj has dominated the historical narrative of the freedom movement. The historical narrative has focused on how political sovereignty was achieved from the British Empire, ignoring completely the “the self to whom this sovereignty belongs, and over whom this sovereignty is exercised” (Vajpeyi 2). Her book then becomes “an account of the search for the self in modern India” (Vajpeyi 1) by analyzing what five of India’s founders thought about the self through their engagement with various texts.

I do not think that the present crisis in democracy requires a revolutionary “epistemological break” of the sort Gandhi conjured with Hind Swaraj. What we need is more of an “epistemological shift” that refocuses our attention on the “Swa”, the Self instead of the “Raj”, the institutions. Therefore to solve the crisis in Indian Democracy, we need to revisit the question of national identity, instead of just redressing malfunctioning democratic institutions. We need to ask ourselves, what it means to be Indian: what is the idea of “Swa”, of the Self that connects the diverse people of India? The present crisis stems out from the abuse of the “Raj”, the democratic institutions. The abuse occurs from the notion that the Indian Self is diverse and incorporates many “Selves”, and that people associate themselves more with their immediate identity rather than their national identity. The association with a national identity has not been made explicit. This confused sense of identity leads to the inefficient use of the democracy in

place. In western terms, India is a Nation-State that tries to represent many different Nations or Peoples. Usually a Nation-State is established after the Nation or the People have been identified. It derives its political legitimacy by acting as a sovereign territorial unit for a particular Nation. A Nation represents a cultural or ethnic entity, while a State is a political and geopolitical entity. The term Nation-State implies that the two coincide geographically. For example the Franks (Nation) came together in the area presently occupied by them to form the Nation-State of France. India's problem lies in the identification of the Indian People, because it contains a multitude of people from the Punjabis to the Marathis to the Rajputs etc. The "epistemological shift" would require a shift in focus from the State to the Nation. The State part of the Nation-State or the "Raj" part of Swaraj has dominated not only the historical narrative of the freedom movement but also the current debate on addressing India's various issues. In the process the "Swa" or the "Nation", which was mediated on by the founders has become lost and unclear.

In this paper I am arguing that to create a strong, just and inclusive Indian Nation-State we need to make explicit the meaning of the Indian People. What does it mean to be an Indian? What forms the self or the "Swa"? It is the same set of questions that Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister insightfully elaborated in his celebrated book *The Discovery of India* at the very beginning of the third chapter, appropriately titled "The Quest":

What was this India that possessed me and beckoned to me continually, urging me to action so that we might realize some vague but deeply-felt desire of our hearts?...What is this India, apart from her physical and geographical aspects? What did she represent in the past? What gave

strength to her then? How did she lose that old strength? And has she lost it completely? Does she represent anything vital now, apart from being the home of a vast number of human beings? How does she fit into the modern world? (Vajpeyi iv)

The purpose of this paper is to argue for a common political platform for people of diverse communities, so that they can peacefully and justly deliberate on different issues. This political platform can resolve the race problem by giving an equal opportunity to different people to engage in democracy. Therefore a common political platform is meant to be used as a tool of deliberation that will strengthen the democratic process. The argument here is that a common political platform is essential for people with different social identities to be able to build consensus. It is essential for a pluralistic democracy like India to function.

I am arguing that to create a common political platform we need to make explicit the identity that people share. This does not mean that I am trying to create a unique Indian identity. Neither am I proposing the idea of coming up with an exhaustive list of existing traits that make someone Indian. My aim is argue for a process that will help people in identifying what they share in common. This shared identity then can be used to create that common political platform essential for democratic deliberation. Therefore the purpose of the paper is to establish the legitimacy of a process that will make explicit the identity that people already share. Once this political identity has been made explicit, it can be used as a tool to make democracy function better, allowing people with different claims to deliberate on their claims on an equal platform.

In the paper I will argue that the process that is most suited to this exercise of finding common ground is Amartya Sen's process of creating Open Impartiality. In Chapter 3, I will show how the Sensian model is appropriate because it seeks to incorporate the differences present in different groups of people and tries to find the common ground necessary for consensus building. I will contrast this with Rawl's method of Closed Impartiality to show how the Sensian method is more suited to the Indian context. In the next chapter I will analyze the vision of two of India's founder, Mohandas Karamchandra Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore. Based on their writings, I will gauge what they thought being Indian meant. In the conclusion I will endeavor to see evaluate if an understanding of their views can then be used constructively to assess what common grounds they shared. This small application of the Sensian model can hopefully be used to assess the efficacy of the model. Hopefully this exercise can also illuminate some basic understanding that can help in the formation of a blueprint for its wider practical application to a larger group of people.

## **Chapter 2- The Philosophical Approaches**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter I will analyze and compare two different philosophical approaches that can be applied to the formation of a just society: Rawls' Closed Impartiality approach and Sen's Open Impartiality approach. Specifically I will assess which one of these approaches is appropriate for understanding shared identity between diverse groups of people: an identity that can provide a common political platform for different people to engage in meaningful democratic deliberation.

Before comparing these two approaches, however I will explore the basis of these philosophical approaches and the importance of this basis. Using Sen's understanding I will analyze the basis by first arguing for the importance of Reason. I will argue that Reason is ultimately important because it fulfills the "demands of Objectivity," which is necessary to establish Impartiality. And Impartiality is the cornerstone of a just society. Therefore both the approaches are different methods of ensuring Impartiality while decisions regarding the structure of society are being deliberated upon. After I have established the importance of Impartiality in creating just societies, I will elucidate and compare the two approaches to Impartiality, eventually arguing that Sen's Open Impartiality is more appropriate to understand and make explicit shared identities between diverse groups of people.

## **Reason, Objectivity and Impartiality**

Sen effectively uses the example of the Mughal Emperor, Akbar to point out the necessity of Reason in scrutinizing social, political, legal and cultural practices. According to Sen in assessing public policy, Akbar's underlying argument was that "the pursuit of reason' (rather than what he called 'the marshy land of tradition') is the way to address difficult problems of good behavior and the challenges of constructing a just society" (Sen 38). Sen goes on to argue that "Akbar took reason to be supreme, since even in disputing reason we would have to give reasons for that disputation" (Sen 39). A prime example of Akbar's reliance on reason was his engagement with social and religious practices. He created systematic dialogues between people from different religious ideologies including agnostics and atheists, even establishing a syncretic religion called Dīn-i Ilāhī that intended to merge the best elements of all religions and promote communal peace and harmony between his diverse subjects. Laying the foundation of a secular and religiously neutral Indian state, Akbar interpreted secularism "as the requirement that the state be equidistant from different religions and must not treat any religion with special favor" (Sen 37). His assessment was based on his reliance on the 'path of reason' or 'the rule of the intellect' (rahi aql), which he concluded was "the basic determinant of good and just behavior as well as of an acceptable framework of legal duties and mechanisms" (Sen 39)

Using Akbar, Sen is able to point out the indispensability of reason in critical scrutiny of ethical judgments. The question remains why 'rahi aql', the rule of the intellect, is seen to be so important? Is it because Reason in itself is a value-giving quality? Or perhaps it is because Reason can provide some surety of reaching the truth.



Sen argues that “the case for reasoned scrutiny lies not in any sure-fire way of getting things exactly right (no such way may exist), but on being as objective as we reasonably can” (Sen 40). According to Sen it is the “demands of objectivity” that require the reliance on the ‘path of reason.’ Sen also addresses the arguments against Reason, where it is used to justify forcefully held beliefs. Sen here argues that if someone justifies their wrongly held beliefs and performs unjust acts then the fault does not lie in Reason itself. Bad reasoning cannot be an appropriate critique of the power of reason. In-fact he argues that the remedy for bad reasoning lies in better reasoning and therefore Reason still reigns supreme.

Sen sees objectivity as a difficult issue in philosophy. He however uses John Rawls’ characterization of moral and political objectivity as the foundation to his understanding of objectivity. John Rawls argues: “The first essential is that a conception of objectivity must establish a public framework of thought sufficient for the concept of judgment to apply and for conclusions to be reached on the basis of reasons and evidence after discussion and due reflection.... To say that a political conviction is objective is to say that there are reasons, specified by a reasonable and mutually recognizable political conception (satisfying those essentials), sufficient to convince all reasonable persons that it is reasonable” (Sen 42). In-spite of some clearly normative demands (particularly the identification of ‘reasonable persons’), Sen argues that Rawls’ approach might not be very different from Habermas’ procedural approach, which focuses on open and informed public discussion. Sen goes onto argue that open public deliberation is important for establishing objectivity and that the “role of unrestricted public reasoning is quite central to democratic politics in general and to the pursuit of social justice in particular” (Sen

44). Regarding Rawls's statement about 'reasonable persons', Sen argues that it is the "characterization of deliberating human beings rather than a categorization of some 'reasonable persons' while excluding others" (Sen 44). Sen thinks that all human beings are capable of being reasonable and of having open-minded deliberations: an idea which is not that fundamentally different from Rawls' own idea of 'free and equal persons' with 'moral powers'.

To elaborate the importance of public reasoning in establishing objectivity, Sen uses Adam Smith's Impartial Spectator approach. Public reasoning would require that perspectives and reasonings presented by any relevant person involved should be given the opportunity to be considered. Rawls' main focus was on variations of personal interests and personal priorities. Whereas Smith's "insistence that we must *inter alia* view our sentiments from a 'certain distance from us' is motivated by the object of scrutinizing not only the influence of vested interests, but also the impact of entrenched tradition and custom" (Sen 45). Smith invokes the Impartial Spectator to avoid issues of local parochialism of values that might inhibit a particular culture from considering certain pertinent arguments.

Sen acknowledges that Habermas, Smith and Rawls approach objectivity similarly "to the extent that objectivity is linked, directly or indirectly, by each of them to the ability to survive challenges from informed scrutiny coming from diverse quarters" (Sen 45). Sen goes on to further argue that the reasons that survive this scrutiny need not be limited to one unique set. Sen is "arguing for the possibility that there may remain contrary positions that simultaneously survive and which cannot be subjected to some radical surgery that reduces them all into one tidy box of complete and well-fitted

demands, which in Rawls theory, take us to some unique institutional route to fulfill these requirements (to be implemented by a sovereign state)” (Sen 46). Sen eventually concludes that “reasoned encounter on an impartial basis” (Sen 46) is a necessity for ethical objectivity.

Therefore in the quest for a just and ethical society, Impartiality based on Objectivity and Reason is paramount. As Sen argues objective deliberation based on reason that can stand public scrutiny is important in establishing impartiality. This is the attempt of both the philosophical approaches illustrated below.

### **Rawls’ Closed Impartiality Approach**

The central idea for Rawls’ theory of justice is that justice has to be understood in terms of the demands of fairness. In this approach fairness is considered to be foundational, preceding the development of principles of justices. But what is fairness? According to Sen, “This foundational idea can be given shape in various ways, but central to it must be a demand to avoid bias in our evaluations, taking interests and concerns of others as well, and in particular the need to avoid being influenced by our respective vested interest, or by our personal priorities or eccentricities or prejudices. It can broadly be seen as a demand for impartiality” (Sen 54).

Rawls addresses these demands of impartiality through his constructive idea of the “Original Position”. The Original Position is an imagined situation where the parties involved are unaware of their own personal identities. This “Veil of Ignorance” creates a situation where the parties have no knowledge of any vested interests, ensuring a primordial equality that removes personal bias and thus creates fairness. As Rawls puts it, “ The original position is the appropriate initial status quo which insures that the

fundamental agreements reached in it are fair. This fact yields the name ‘justice as fairness’”(Sen 55). It is important to note here that Rawls considers justice as fairness as a political conception of justice that allows people with diverging views, to have a common basis for public discussion on fundamental political questions.

Rawls uses this ‘veil of ignorance’ exercise to identify the legitimate principles of justice that determine the choice of just institutions required to create the basic structure of a society. Rawls makes the strong claim that a specific set of principles of justice would unanimously emerge from the Original Position, constituting a specific political conception of justice that would be shared by all the members of that society. Thus these specific principles of justice would impact the choice of institutions, which will create the basic structure of society, as well as influence the political conception of justice, which would influence individual behaviors that will conform to this conception.

The unanimous agreement on these principles of justice under a ‘veil of ignorance’ is the first step in Rawls’ mutli-staged conception of a just society. The principles of justice lead to the ‘constitutional stage’ where actual institutions are selected based on the principles, taking into account the circumstances of each society. The working of these institutions occurs in the “legislative stage,” where appropriate laws are enacted and social decisions are made. The whole process, based on the two unique principles of justice, has very specific steps that finally lead to the establishment of just institutions that ensure a just society.

The principles of justice he comes up with are as follows (Sen 59):

1. First: each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others.<sup>[1]</sup>

2. Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that (Rawls, 1971, p.302; revised edition, p. 47):

(a) they are to be of the greatest benefit to the least-advantaged members of society, consistent with the just savings principle (the difference principle).

(b) offices and positions must be open to everyone under conditions of fair equality of opportunity.

It is important to note that in his principles of justice, Rawls prioritizes liberty, giving precedence to the first principle. Sen argues that even though Rawls' claim of absolute superiority of liberty might seem extreme, "the more general claim that lies behind all this is that liberty cannot be reduced to being only a facility that complements other facilities (such as economic opulence); there is something very special about the place of personal liberty in human lives" (Sen 59). Therefore liberty's importance lies not only as means to an end but also an end itself. Rawls addresses issues of institutional choice in his second principle. The first part is concerned with distributive equity as well as overall efficiency. It is called the 'Difference Principle' and it focuses on making the worst of people as well off as possible. The second part is concerned with ensuring that public opportunities are open to all and that no one is excluded for arbitrary reasons like race, religion etc.

In analyzing equity of distribution, Rawls invokes the concept of 'primary goods' that include things such as 'rights, liberties and opportunities, income and wealth, and the social bases of self-respect,' which are essentially means to achieve different ends. Certain things that are not included in the distributional concerns include claims based on entitlements related to ideas of merits and deserts, or on ownership of property. An

interesting thing that Rawls acknowledges is productivities that advance efficiency and equity. Inequalities related to such productivities are allowed if the Difference Principle is upheld, for example through the operation of incentives. Such concession to the operation of incentives is highly contentious and has been criticized on various grounds.

### ***Positives of Rawls' Approach***

There are many positive contributions that Rawls' approach has made to our thinking in moral and political philosophy. First, the foundational idea of "justice as fairness", which makes fairness central to the notion of justice, adds valuable insights into our understanding of political philosophy. Second, Rawls' argument about the nature and importance of objectivity in practical reason has far-reaching implications on our understanding and use of reason in deliberations. Third, Rawls points out "the moral powers' that people possess allowing them the 'capacity for a sense of justice.' This is in contrast to the rational choice theory in which human beings are only interested in their own self, without any regard for other ideas of fairness and justice. Rawls is further able to enrich the concept of rationality by pursuing the distinction between 'rational' and 'reasonable.' Fourth, Rawls' focus on liberty draws attention "to the strong case for seeing liberty as a separate and, in many ways, overriding concern in the assessment of the justice of social arrangements" (Sen 63). This is separate from the role liberty plays as a 'primary good', as a general means to an end, for example in the practice of public reasoning, which forms the basis of social evaluation. Fifth, Rawls' focus on procedural fairness by insisting on equal opportunity for all significantly adds to our understanding of inequality, which has often focused on inequality of outcomes. Sixth, the priority given

to distributional equity through the Difference Principle draws attention to the predicament of the worst-off people in terms of deprivation of 'Primary Goods.' This has been a powerful influence in public policy regarding poverty removal. Finally according to Sen by focusing on 'Primary Goods,' "Rawls gives indirect acknowledgment to the importance of human freedom in giving people real-as distinct from only formally recognized- opportunity to do what they would like with their own lives" (Sen 64).

### **Sen's Open Impartiality Approach**

Sen's approach is inspired by Adam Smith's thought experiment on impartiality, which invokes the device of the 'impartial spectator.' In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith explains the idea of an 'impartial spectator' as the requirement to "examine our own conduct as we imagine any other fair and impartial spectator would examine it" (Sen 124). The basic distinction that Sen sees between the Rawls's Closed Impartiality approach and Smith's 'impartial spectator' device, is that Smith's focus is to broaden the reach of ethical inquiry by bringing in disinterested people from other societies as well. The perspectives are not necessarily accounted for in Rawls' approach.

To understand Sen's approach it is important to realize the distinction between two general approaches to thinking about political philosophy: transcendental institutionalism and realization-focused comparison. Transcendental institutionalism concentrates "on identifying just institutional arrangements for a society" (Sen 5). The focus here is on identifying perfect justice and on getting the institutions right. The 'contractarian' tradition, which Rawls is a part of, focuses on transcendental institutionalism. On the other hand, realization-focused comparison are "often interested

primarily in the removal of manifest injustice” (Sen 7). For this tradition the focus is not on perfect justice, but actual realized justice. Sen like Smith is a proponent of this tradition.

Therefore Sen’s focus is not on achieving perfect justice. He wants to focus on creating a more just world rather than a perfectly just world. To do so Sen argues for the expansion of impartiality. Sen’s approach requires the use of two devices: Smith’s ‘impartial spectator’ and public reasoning. He argues that to ensure justice, one must expand the discussion by impartially incorporating the viewpoints of different people. For example if two diverse groups of people came in contact, then to ensure that they could form a union which was fair and sustainable both groups would have to engage in impartial public discussion and find common ground. Impartiality would be achieved using the device of the ‘impartial spectator’, where members of each group would scrutinize their beliefs and the beliefs of others by assuming the role of an unbiased third party. Based on this interaction, both groups would find some common ground that will ensure a fair union between the groups.

This process would be repeated to expand and include other groups of people. It is important to note that unlike Rawls’ approach, Sen’s approach believes that impartiality is achieved by increasing the number of opinions. Sen’s approach, unlike Rawls’ approach also incorporates the differences in people’s opinion to increase effectiveness. Sen acknowledges differences in people’s beliefs and instead of ignoring them like Rawls, uses it to powerfully argue for a type of impartiality that is perhaps more practical to achieve and to expand.



### **Closed Impartiality vs. Open Impartiality: Why Sen works better than Rawls?**

The problem with India is that there are many different groups of people with different social identities. Their national identity as an Indian is not explicit, making Indian Democracy highly factionalized and ineffective. Therefore the aim of this paper is to find a legitimate approach that can incorporate the many different social identities of the Indian people, to hopefully find a common political platform that can be used by the people to engage in democratic discourse and make democracy efficient. In this section I am arguing that that legitimate approach is the Sensian approach and that it is better than the Rawlsian approach because of the following reasons:

#### ***Presupposition of Identity***

The main reason why Rawls' Closed Impartiality approach does not solve India's problem is that it presupposes the existence of a common political identity. In the "Veil of Ignorance," different persons come together to discuss the principles of justice and create a just society around these principles. This discussion however happens with no person knowing what their personal identity is going to be in the actual society. The only thing they know is that they are part of a particular society for which they are coming together in the "Veil of Ignorance." This piece of knowledge, the only information that the persons have coming into the "Veil of Ignorance," assumes the pre-existence of a common political identity. Rawls assumes that the persons coming into the "Veil of Ignorance" know that they are part of a particular Nation, coming to form a just Nation-State: he assumes the existence of a common political identity. While this assumption is

appropriate for a European conception of the Nation-State where people formed their countries based on their common ethnicity, this assumption clearly does not solve the problem of a missing common political identity for the ethnically diverse Indians.

Furthermore Rawls' pre-supposition of a common political identity would not incorporate the multiple social identities that people might identify with. Rawls' model would seek to ignore the existence of different social identities, assuming that people will concentrate on only their common political identity in the "Veil of Ignorance." This is again problematic for India's case where people with different strong social identities, based on different criteria such as religion, caste, region among others, exist. Sen's approach on the other hand not only does not assume the existence of a common political identity, it also incorporates the differences that exist among diverse group of people. Sen's model works by acknowledging the existence of multiple social identities and using that knowledge to identify common ground to create a common political platform that enables deliberation among diverse group of people. Sen's model works better for India because it opens up the discussion to diversity, rather than close the discussion to a particular group of people like the Rawlsian model.

### ***Feasibility of Unique solutions- Plurality of Reasons***

The second criticism relates to Rawls' unique choice of the two principles of justice. Rawls strongly claims that "they are the principles that rational and free persons concerned to further their own interests would accept in an initial position of equality as defining the fundamentals of the terms of their association" ([Rawls, p 11- Wiki). His whole unfolding of completely just societal arrangement is based on these two specific principles of justice. Sen however argues that there is the "possible sustainability of

plural and competing reasons for justice, all of which have claims to impartiality and which nevertheless differ from-and rival- each other” (Sen 12). There is a possibility of a plurality of unbiased reasons, all of which incorporate impartiality and fairness, and can be ‘will(ed) to be a universal law’ (Kant’s Universal law for evaluating reasons). This is especially pertinent in the case of India, where due to the multiplicity of social identities, people have different but impartial reasons for justice. The social diversity in India ensures the plurality of impartial reasons.

Sen illustrates this point with an example in which one has to decide which of three children should get a flute they are quarreling about. The first child claims the flute on the ground that she is the only one that knows how to play it. The second child claims it on the ground that he is the poorest of them all and has no other toys and therefore needs the flute to play. The third child claims that he actually made the flute with his own labor and therefore deserves the fruits of his labor. Theorists of different schools of thought would give weightage to different considerations. A utilitarian might support the first child because it might result in most pleasure. An economic egalitarian would support the second child and a libertarian would support the third child. All three arguments point to a different type of impartial and non-arbitrary reason, which cannot be brushed aside as baseless. They are not just about the vested interest of each children, rather they highlight how different social realizations can be achieved based on different social institutions that are founded on different principles. This shows that there is a possibility that plurality of reasons can exist. Therefore if there is no unique emergence of a given set of principles then the entire process of ‘justice as fairness’ would be hard to justify.

### ***Actual Behaviors***

According to Rawls the basic structure of society is ‘the primary subject of justice’ (Sen 67). He is focusing almost exclusively on ‘just institutions’, without taking into account actual behavior of people that would influence the creation of ‘just societies.’ Sen argues that Rawls’ approach is a very ‘niti’ centered approach, where the focus is organizational propriety and behavioral correctness. Sen instead advocates a more ‘nyaya’ based approach that focuses on the comprehensive concept of realized justice. Accordingly there are two issues that emerge with this ‘niti’ based approach.

First one cannot neglect the actual social realizations that emerge from any choice of institutions that are impacted by other social features such as behavioral pattern. One has to take into account ‘Nyaya’ or realized justice for social evaluation. Second, even if we agreed that through the exercise of ‘justice as fairness’ one can identify ‘reasonable’ or ‘just’ conduct, how would we enforce that behavior in a world where people’s actual behavior would be different. Rawls argues that a ‘political conception’ of justice would be formed and would be accepted by all, but that might still be very different from the actual behavior of people. Ultimately for any practical application, a political theory cannot just identify ‘just’ institutions for a society without making them contingent on actual behavior, because practical reasoning about social justice requires a combination of both.

### ***Relevance of Global Perspectives***

As mentioned before, the social contract approach propagated by Rawls inescapably limits the number of participants in the discussion to the members of a given society or the ‘people.’ If one continues with this approach then the way to include everyone in the

world would be to have a ‘cosmopolitan’ extension of the Rawlsian original position, which is deeply problematic and impractical. And yet one cannot ignore the relevance of what happens outside one’s society or country to better evaluate justice. This is because the happenings in a country have an influence, sometimes huge on the rest of the world. Second, each society has parochial beliefs, which might need more global scrutiny to broaden the scope of discussion and considerations. While the Rawlsian approach deals with issues of vested interest of individuals within a given society, it is unable to address issues of local parochialism present in the society. Therefore to ensure a just Indian state, it is important to take into account multiple perspectives, even the ones outside the country. This task is better performed by Sen’s Open Impartiality approach rather than Rawls’ Closed Impartiality approach.

## **Chapter 3- Indian Thinkers**

In this chapter, based on their writings, I will elaborate the visions that two main founders of India had regarding the country: M.K Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore. The aim of this chapter is to first understand what both these visionaries thought was the meaning of being Indian. After their views have been explained I will conclude by applying Sen's approach and seeing if their different notions of being Indian have any common ground. Hopefully this minor application can provide an insight into how a practical blueprint of Sen's approach for a larger group of people can be established.

### **Mohandas Karamchandra Gandhi**

M.K Gandhi was the preeminent leader of the Indian freedom movement, leading the country to independence in 1947. He is most famous for his theories of "Satyagraha" (insistence on truth or truth-force) and "Ahimsa," which he employed in his radical non-violent civil disobedience movement against the British. His life and his philosophy have endeared him to the Indian public and has been an inspiration the world over for similar non-violent freedom movements. Vajpeyi captures the essence and importance of Gandhi's life when she describes a famous mural dedicated to him, which paints Gandhi "as a timeless figure, the protagonist of a narrative that is as much moral as it is historical, its events and transitions marked by Gandhi's mistakes, realizations, epiphanies, and miracles—moments that bring together a man's mortal life, the history of India, and the greater quest of the human race for an ethical society" (Vajpeyi 53).

In this section, using Vajpeyi's analysis I will explain the lens with which Gandhi viewed Indian claims to selfhood and sovereignty. He essentially used the two political categories of Swaraj (Self-Rule) and Ahimsa (Non-Violence) to explore the question of Indian identity. These categories are explained in the following sections.

### *Introduction to the categories*

According to Vajpeyi two important political categories that were applied by Gandhi to understand Indian identity and lay the political foundations of Modern India were Swaraj (Self-Rule) and Ahimsa (Non-Violence). She argues that semantically the self is present in both the categories. Swaraj directly incorporates the self, literally meaning the rule (raj) of the self (Swa). Ahimsa literally means the "the absence of the desire to harm." It incorporates the self through a concealed desiderative (hims-), stating that harm is absent (negativizer "a") from the intention of the implied subject, the self. It is important to understand that in Gandhi's idea of the self, both the individual and a collective selfhood were addressed. Thus his intention was to understand "how one might purify one's being by removing from it the reflex of violence (the intention to harm another) and, simultaneously, how a non-violent political community might be constructed for the greater good of India and humanity at large" (Vajpeyi 50).

At this point it would be natural to ask why Swaraj and Ahimsa are specifically chosen? One might argue that a narrow focus on Swaraj and Ahimsa might not provide a complete understanding of Gandhi and his political philosophy. A comprehensive analysis would require a study of all the various concepts he propagated, especially the method in which he linked these concepts with each other. In-fact the linkages that he created make it even harder to isolate certain political categories from the rest. This is

especially problematic because unlike a Kant or a Rousseau, Gandhi was not necessarily a systematic philosopher. He was a political visionary more in the mold of Madison, Jefferson and even Lincoln.

Vajpeyi chooses Swaraj and Ahimsa as the categories to understand Gandhi's political ideology because these two categories play a central role in defining a modern Indian political identity. They permit "Gandhian nationalism to ground itself in the idea of a political tradition that has, at once, historical continuity, pan-Indian resonance, and a creative capacity, responsive to the needs of a rapidly transforming present" (Vajpeyi 51). Gandhi's understanding of Swaraj derived from existing Indic categories that denote transcendental liberation, redefines the concept already present in nationalist dialogue to take it to the next phase. His use of Ahimsa resonates with Indians by connecting with the primary themes from their political mytho-history. Therefore Gandhi's Swaraj and Ahimsa are of particular importance because they have historical Indic roots that make them powerful concepts for the Indian people. As Vajpeyi aptly puts it:

Under Gandhi's intellectual leadership, swaraj and ahimsa, whose theater in Congress discourse was understood to be primarily political, became so thoroughly enmeshed with their sister categories already present in Indic discourses of transcendence that politics, ethics, and metaphysics began for the first time to share a common conceptual terrain. This Gandhian stroke of genius revitalized and revolutionized a tradition in crisis.

(Vajpeyi 52)



Furthermore Gandhi uses Swaraj and Ahimsa not merely as ethical ideas in some robust theory of ethical philosophy but also as practical tools for living life. This categorization allows him to create a conceptual structure that can be used to assess India's political history. Through the categories of Swaraj and Ahimsa, he is able to create a framework that can be used to assess the Indic conception of freedom and identity. These factors make the concepts of Swaraj and Ahimsa particularly important in Gandhi's whole philosophy.

### ***Swaraj (Self-Rule)***

Gandhi wrote Hind Swaraj in 10 days while onboard a ship travelling from London to Johannesburg. Using MacIntyre's theory, Vajpeyi has argued that this text written in a moment of epiphany characterized by *claritas* (lucidity) and *veritas* (truth), resolves a crisis in Indic political tradition. Gandhi was confronting a political crisis presented by the Partition of Bengal in 1905, the creation of the Muslim League in 1906, the split between the moderate and the extremist factions of the Congress in 1907 and the failure of the Swadeshi ideology in 1908. He did this by reinterpreting original Indic categories like Swaraj and Ahimsa.

It's interesting to note that Gandhi's epistemological crisis was present both in the political tradition that he was part of and his own personal journey, making him both Galileo like and Hamlet like in MacIntyre's account. His personal crisis included his own struggles with celibacy (*brahmacharya*), with meat eating and vegetarianism, and his experience of racial prejudice against him in South Africa. In-fact MacIntyre argues that crisis in the personal self are related and traceable to the crisis in the overarching tradition. As Vajpeyi puts it:

But a crisis in the self, for MacIntyre, is ultimately traceable to or concomitant with a crisis in the tradition that has formed the self. In this way, an epistemological crisis that affects any given individual is related to a larger epistemological crisis that affects a tradition as such, for traditions and selves are mutually constitutive. By this ontology, selfhood is embedded in a tradition. (Vajpeyi, 57)

Vajpeyi goes onto argue that the protagonist for this Indic political crisis is Gandhi because his personal conflicts and tragedies run parallel to the larger narrative of the freedom movement that experiences the crisis in tradition. Gandhi experiences profound personal crisis whenever his non-violent political campaigns turn violent, especially culminating in the massacre of the partition that accompanies India's independence. Therefore Gandhi has a crisis in his own self, which are traced back to the crisis in Indic political tradition.

Vajpeyi believes that Gandhi's Hind Swaraj is his reflection on the epistemological crisis that could destroy the Indic politic. The epistemological break that Gandhi provides comes from his endeavor "to show that what you call Swaraj is not truly Swaraj": his redefinition of the sovereignty of the self (Vajpeyi 58). The term "svarāj" or "svarājya" was first used by the Marathas in defiance of Mughal authority in the mid-seventeenth century, invoking the idea of Maratha self rule. From this stemmed the idea of Hindu self-rule, which inspired nationalists like Tilak, Gokhale, and Ranade at the beginning of the twentieth century, effectively bringing the term into nationalistic

discourse. But this idea of Swaraj held different meaning for different groups. Religious extremists thought of Swaraj as the independence or rule of their particular religion, without much consideration for a unified India. The colonial government supported partial autonomy where India would still be Britain's subordinate. The Moderates and even the Congress under Nehru, did not insist on 100 percent self determination. It was only in the 1940s that the idea of "purna swaraj" or rule of India by Indians, gained ground. But what was Swaraj according to Gandhi? Partha Chatterjee has argued that even though "purna swaraj" was achieved in 1947, it was incomplete because this "political" swaraj fell short of the "true" swaraj that Gandhi had originally envisioned (Vajpeyi 59).

Gandhi reinvented the term Swaraj in the same way he reinvented Ahimsa, by connecting the term to its historical meaning. Gandhi's Swaraj was related to the historical categories of Moksha and Nirvana, which denoted freedom. These categories however were ethical categories that came out of the discourses of transcendence instead of the discourses of politics. Mukherjee has traced the genealogy of this Gandhian Swaraj and has argued that this origin makes sense because "Gandhi himself thought of "freedom" equally in political and in transcendental terms; or, to put it in another way, in Western and in Indic terms" (Vajpeyi 60). Therefore for Gandhi, Swaraj was just not about political freedom; it was about a wider notion of complete human emancipation, of which political freedom was just one aspect.

Vajpeyi has argued that Gandhi's main influence has been the Bhagavad Gita, a philosophical dialogue between Krishna and Arjun that shows the different paths to attain liberation. In the dialogue, Krishna argues that there are three equally legitimate paths

(mārga) to attain ultimate freedom (mokṣa): knowledge (jñāna), action (karma), and devotion (bhakti). Krishna also suggests that the means for the liberation of the soul from the cycle of rebirth incorporates both the discipline of detachment (anāsakti yoga) and of action free of the desire for its outcome (niśkāma karma). Mukherjee has argued that Gandhi's fight was not only for the political emancipation of India, but also for this complete liberation of the soul. Gandhi's rigorous exercises of self discipline, combined with his political actions were all along simultaneously oriented towards both these goals: the freedom of both the man and the nation. Therefore a political conception of "liberty", as professed in the Western world was only one half of the "liberty" that Gandhi envisioned in his life. Gandhi's Swaraj was about complete liberation that was political but more importantly personal, almost to the extent that the political was dependent on the personal.

### ***Ahimsa (Non-Violence)***

Historically, Ahimsa is mainly found in Jain doctrine, the Mahābhārata, the edicts of Ashoka and occasionally in Brahmanical and Buddhist literature. The term seems to have been limited to debates around certain social issues such as war, ritual sacrifice, asceticism, hunting, and vegetarianism. Centuries later Gandhi is mainly thinking about war and vegetarianism, and to an extent certain ascetic practices pertaining to brahmacharya (celibacy): other aspects of the original social context in which Ahimsa was used have disappeared. Ahimsa has mainly been a concern of ascetically oriented religious schools, notably different types of Jainism and in certain cases some Buddhist and Yogic schools. Even the epics have recognized the impracticality of its usage in everyday life, especially for the political class.

Vajpeyi points out that there have been only two major exceptions to this apolitical application of Ahimsa in Indic antiquity: the reign of the Mauryan emperor, Aśoka and the story of one of the main protagonists of the Mahābhārata, Yudhiṣṭhira. Vajpeyi convincingly argues against the objection that Yudhiṣṭhira may or may not be a historical figure. She points out that, “both have an equally complicated relationship to historicity. To the extent that both figures are indispensable to any history of moral life in the Indic world, both “exist” in the exact same way” (Vajpeyi 61).

Having established this, Vajpeyi investigates the role played by the moral personalities called Aśoka and Yudhiṣṭhira in influencing India’s founders search for an Indic selfhood and an Indic sovereignty. Vajpeyi argues:

(that both these figures) are associated centrally with a discourse that connects power and violence, a king’s prerogative to rule versus his duty to protect, the compulsions of order versus the demands of care. Both yearn for peace and rectitude in near-apocalyptic circumstances. Both embody the extreme moral dilemma (dharma-saṅkaṭa) that produces narratives marked by irony and tragedy. Both are portrayed through tropes like the riddle, the curse, and the change of heart—archaic “experiments with truth”. (Vajpeyi 63)

In Indic political tradition their Ahimsa is most similar to Gandhi’s “non-violence”, because they all believe that non-violence forms the very basis on which an ideal society can be established. According to them non-violence is the “very principle that upholds the world and makes possible ordered human existence” (Vajpeyi 63).

Ahimsa originally belonged in the family of virtues, which were meant to regulate the relationship between the self and the other. Practicing virtues like Ahimsa would lead to a harmony between our material and our moral existence, eventually producing personal liberation. Thus Ahimsa was a personal concept, one of many virtues meant for self-discipline and self-control. This made the redefining of Ahimsa from a personal to a political concept harder to accomplish. To translate Ahimsa as “non-violence” and to treat it as a political virtue, Gandhi refocused on the political context in which Aśoka and Yudhiṣṭhira had used the term. He highlighted the ethical transformation that Aśoka went through after the Kalinga war that converted him from a conqueror to a Buddhist king. He invoked the ethical dilemmas that Yudhiṣṭhira faced while wielding power, stressing how Yudhiṣṭhira “named ānṛśaṃsya (literally, the opposite of being murderous) as the highest type of normative compulsion (paramo dharmah)” (Vajpeyi 63). Therefore Gandhi was able to reignite a political tradition essentially by recalling it and readapting it to the need of the time. He was able to show the relevance of “this Indic tradition, which attempted to remove harm and the desire to harm (himsā) altogether from the equation between any two persons, (which) stood in contrast to the Western tradition as defined by Machiavelli and Hobbes, where the social contract is premised on the capacity for mutual harm held in check and traded for interests” (Vajpeyi 64).

Vajpeyi asserts that Ahimsa has three distinct semantic characteristics that yield three distinct types of action: renunciation (sannyāsa), service (sevā) and normative conduct in political life (dharma/dhamma). She argues that Gandhi’s brilliance “lies in his ability to harness all three potential significations of ahimsa at once, to use it to suggest the possibility of renunciative freedom, promote the ethic of social service, and

hold up the ideal of a righteous republic” (Vajpeyi 64). It might seem counterintuitive but Gandhi derives his concept of Ahimsa from the Bhagavad Gita, a discourse on the necessity of fighting a war and performing one’s duty without much focus on the ultimate consequences. Vajpeyi argues that this predicament lies in our understanding of Ahimsa as “non-violence,” which confuses rather than clarifies the concept. According to Gandhi, Ahimsa was required to tackle the moral problem of violence. He did not envision Ahimsa generating passivity or creating people who meekly bear injustice and hide from violence that is present both within themselves and around them. Instead he envisioned the cultivation of Ahimsa as a mighty struggle in understanding violence and overcoming its influence despite its prevalence in life. This is the primary meaning of Ahimsa that is undermined by translating it only as “non-violence.”

In the Gita, “ahimsa in and of itself is neither prominent nor elaborated as a category” (Vajpeyi 66), instead it is mentioned as one of many characteristics of an ethical man. It is just a good quality to have like many others and therefore there would be no explicit reason for a reader of the text to be attracted to the notion of “Ahimsa.” Gandhi however understands Ahimsa differently as the core relationship between the self and the other that one must master to win any battle. In the Gita, it is the moral dilemma that Arjun is facing at the prospect of fighting his kin. For India it is the battle against the colonial rule. Therefore for Gandhi Ahimsa is not just another value listed in the Gita, “it is in fact the essence of the entire Gita, the text’s full import distilled into a single category” (Vajpeyi 67). Without cultivating Ahimsa – the absence of a desire to explicitly harm someone for the sake of harming them - Arjun cannot win the battle of Kurukshetra, India cannot attain independence from the British and in-fact one cannot enter

dharmakṣetra, “the very ground of normativity upon which ethical action unfolds in the world” (Vajpeyi 68).

Vajpeyi goes onto make the argument that if the essence of Krishna’s message was “niškāma karma—action untainted by desire for its outcome—then ahimsa—absence of the desire to harm—must equally qualify all of our dealings with others, even our adversaries (and in some ways, most especially our adversaries)” (Vajpeyi 68). Therefore ethical actions should avoid both being driven by desire, kāma or being driven by blind violence, hiṃsā. Gandhi constructs political action, the politics of Swaraj, around this understanding of Ahimsa. Therefore when Krishna describes a yogi of the highest order as “one who regards all others equally, by analogy with himself, in both joy and sorrow” (Vajpeyi 68) he is describing exactly what Gandhi understood by Ahimsa. This is even more explicit when in chapter 11, verse 55 Krishna says, “O Pāṇḍava, one who is devoid of ill-will towards other beings, he alone comes to me!” (Vajpeyi 68), praising someone who is essentially following Gandhian Ahimsa. As Vajpeyi puts it aptly:

Gandhi comes to the paradoxical conclusion that to put up a fight in one’s right mind, with fearlessness, with clarity, with purpose and concentration, without a desire to harm others but with the determination to get beyond the here and now, this is ahimsa. If ill-intentioned or thoughtless violence is hiṃsā, and paralyzed, cowardly non-violence is glāni, then what Krishna is exhorting Arjuna to do, to pick up arms in a courageous and conscientious manner, is, however counterintuitive it may seem, ahimsa. (Vajpeyi 77)



Other authors such as Mehta have suggested that Gandhi's focus on ahimsa take him outside the binary of war and peace in a Hobbesian political construct. Gita according to Gandhi is not about war and violence but it's about the training of the will to cultivate ahimsa, an endeavor that everyone should consciously undertake. In-fact Mehta goes onto argue that Gandhi's thinking does not align with modern politics, not even democracy, reflecting his radical anti-political thinking. Therefore Gandhi cannot imagine freedom or self-rule in Britain's parliamentary democracy. Gandhi believes:

(That) unless there is freedom from fear (abhaya), the achievement of true non-violence (ahimsa), and the adherence to the truth (satyagraha), all India can hope for is "English rule without the Englishman," as Gandhi writes in Hind Swaraj. This view is completely consistent with his reading of the Gita, which is concerned neither with Kaurava victory nor Pāṇḍava defeat, nor the death or survival of this or that hero or general, nor even with the winning of the kingdom of Hastināpura, but with the clarification of Arjuna's will, the purification of his self, and its cleansing through the dialogic process of self-examination under Krishna's guidance. (Vajpeyi 79)

### ***Conclusion***

Gandhi is not just fighting for the political freedom of India; he is fighting for an idea of India that believes in the complete liberation of the human mind and soul. He does not just envision political freedom from the British in terms of political self-determination but he envisions a society where higher goals of human righteousness (Dharma) are cherished. This according to him this is the goal of the Indic civilization.

This is his idea of “Purna Swaraj” (Complete Self-Rule). To achieve this goal, Gandhi believes in the cultivation of Ahimsa, which forms the crux of a society that values righteousness and ethical behavior. Therefore for Gandhi, Swaraj is attained on the bedrock of Ahimsa.

## **Rabindranath Tagore**

### ***Introduction***

In the formation of Nation-States, certain poets have had a monumental role in framing and communicating the values and vision of their nation. Walt Whitman was declared America’s “poet of democracy”, Muhammed Iqbal was conferred the title of *Muffakir-e-Pakistan* (مفکر پاکستان, "The Thinker of Pakistan") and W.B Yeats was a central figure in Irish nationalism. In a list of such nationalist poets, it would seem that Rabindranath Tagore would be India’s natural choice. Considering how both India and Bangladesh have adopted his songs as their national anthems, and how Tagore’s work has had an immeasurable impact on Indian literature especially Bengali literature so much so that one cannot imagine Bengali tradition without invoking Tagore, and how Tagore’s Nobel award in Literature, the first by a non-European, has endeared him in national consciousness, one cannot be blamed for putting Tagore in the same category as Whitman, Iqbal, Yeats or even Bengal’s Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. This categorization of Tagore however would be inaccurate.

Vajpeyi succinctly characterizes Tagore as “a national poet who does not believe in the very form of the nation-state, and who is avowedly against nationalism in both of its meanings—as the aspiration of subjugated peoples for political self-determination, and

as the pride of already free nations in their nationality. He flatly opposes nationhood as the telos of politics” (Vajpeyi 94). According to Vajpeyi, Tagore’s political significance lies in his refusal to articulate poetry/art and nationalism with one another. She correctly points out that “unlike Whitman, Rabindranath the poet does not sing democracy; unlike Yeats, he does not sing the homeland; unlike Iqbal, he does not sing the nation of the faithful. As an artist, unlike Abanindranath, he does not paint “Mother India.” We cannot apply to him any of the usual monikers—he was not a cultural, religious, political, or aesthetic nationalist” (Vajpeyi 92). Instead Tagore used categories such as samāj (society), sāhitya (literature) and swadeshi (indigenous), which both etymologically and philosophically, emphasized community, togetherness, and belonging. For Tagore there was an important distinction between rashtra (nation) and samāj (society), with him being more attracted towards the latter concept.

In this section I will point out that Tagore did not believe in a political identity as conceptualized in the framework of a nation-state. In-fact he rejected western nationalism declaring unequivocally that “neither the colourless vagueness of cosmopolitanism, nor the fierce self-idolatry of nation-worship is the goal of human history” (Tagore v). Using Tagore’s writings on Nationalism, I would argue that instead Tagore believed that Indians derived their identity from the society, which “is a natural regulation of relationships and the spontaneous self-expression of man as a social being” (Tagore v). For Tagore samāj (society) had greater importance than the rashtra (nation). His reasoning was based on his historical understanding of India as a “social civilization founded on continual social adjustment” (Tagore v). In this regard Tagore believed in the historical conception of India as a culture rather than in its new potential as a nation state.

Vajpeyi describes this longing for the deep past by using the category of “viraha,” Bengali/Sanskrit for the longing produced by a separation between lovers. Using his work, especially his attachment to the Kalidasa’s Meghadūta, Vajpeyi argues that Tagore was in love with the India of the past. I am arguing that Tagore’s conception of an Indian identity is based on a social culture, and is derived from his “viraha” for the historical past. This is very different than the conception that other thinkers have about identity. As Vajpeyi puts it “an idea of India that resembles a separated lover for whom one longs in perpetuity is very different from the idea of India as a nation-state, the object of political desire, subject to political will, attainable through political action” (Vajpeyi 90).

### ***Rashtra (Nation) vs. Samāj (Society)***

In his lectures on Nationalism, Tagore famously declared that, “I am not against one nation in particular, but against the general idea of all nations” (Tagore 97). For Tagore “society is the expression of moral and spiritual aspirations of man which belong to his higher nature” (Tagore 106). He argued that the idea of organizing people, who work incessantly to increase the strength and efficiency of a larger mechanical system, diverts “man’s energy from his higher nature where he is self-sacrificing and creative” (Tagore 97), where he is moral. A man’s higher purpose of being a moral being might be compromised for an inadequate goal of being a dutiful citizen. Tagore feels that by using his power of sacrifice for a nation, a man might develop a false sense of moral exaltation that can be extremely dangerous to the larger humanity. A nation is the creation of a man’s intellect and does not necessarily encompass his entire moral personality. A man can become dangerous to humanity by not critically scrutinizing the demands of his

moral conscience when performing actions, and instead transferring that responsibility onto this larger machine. Tagore eloquently illustrates this danger in the following passage:

By this device (nationalism) the people which loves freedom perpetuates slavery in a large portion of the world with the comfortable feeling of pride of having done its duty; men who are naturally just can be cruelly unjust both in their act and their thought, accompanied by a feeling that they are helping the world in receiving its deserts; men who are honest can blindly go on robbing others of their human rights for self aggrandizement, all the while abusing the deprived for not deserving better treatment (Tagore 98).

Tagore further argues that this Nationalism will not work for India because of its unique history that bestows upon it a distinct problem; “the race problem.” Tagore believes that European countries’ political and commercial character emerged from two factors: their ethnically homogenous populations and their insufficient natural resources. This allowed the people of each country to have fewer internal complications but more external threats in the form of strong neighbors, keen on plundering their limited resources. To tackle this issue they had to politically organize internally to be able to commercially exploit their neighbors. He argues that this is the spirit with which the countries of the West exploit the rest of the world through colonialism.

In contrast, India’s main concern is the social problem of accommodating different races. According to Tagore, Indian civilization has been “seeking to find out something common to all races, which will prove their real unity” (Tagore 93). Finding

an answer to this problem is India's mission. Tagore's problem with Indian nationalism is that it seeks a solution for a problem that is not necessarily India's biggest concern, ignoring India's prime issue of social diversity. As Tagore states, "each nation must be conscious of its mission and we, in India, must realize that we cut a poor figure when we are trying to be political, simply because we have not yet been finally able to accomplish what was set before us by our providence" (Tagore 86).

Tagore argues that there are two ways in which India has tried to address the race problem in the past: spiritual unity and rigid social categorization. Tagore believes that "no nation looking for a mere political or commercial basis of unity will find such a solution sufficient. Men of thought and power will discover the spiritual unity, will realize it, and preach it" (Tagore 94). According to Tagore only spiritual unity can connect the various differences that manifest in human society. Recognizing and accepting that there are various paths to happiness and that true happiness exists in celebrating this diversity, is the only way to ensure harmony in a diverse society. Such notions of spiritual unity were celebrated and preached throughout India through its various saints such as Nanak, Kabir, Chaitanya and others who propagated the idea of one God to all the races of India.

In terms of social categorization, Tagore uses the example of the caste system to show how India used social institutions to stitch a spirit of toleration. According to him the caste system has "produced something like a United States of a social federation, whose common name is Hinduism" (Tagore 102). Through the caste system, India was able to recognize the diversity of the races and the importance of maintaining those differences. According to Tagore, where India failed was in its inability to realize that

differences in human beings are not fixed like physical differences, but are instead fluid and ever-changing. While recognizing differences provided stability, the inability to recognize the change in differences deprived India of the opportunity to grow. Tagore eloquently puts it as follows:

In trying to avoid collisions she (India) set up boundaries of immovable walls, this giving to her numerous races the negative benefit of peace and order but not the positive opportunity of expansion and movement. She accepted nature where it produces diversity, but ignored it where it uses that diversity for its world-game of infinite permutations and combinations. She treated life in all truth where it is manifold, but insulted it where it is ever moving. (Tagore 103)

An example of this is the manner in which India associated different trades and professions with different castes, bringing the production of commodities under the law of social adjustments. According to Tagore this had the positive impact of building cooperation that satisfied the social needs of the people. However India's rigid focus on the law of hereditary and a loss of competition led to economic stagnation and a focus on traditionalism. This, Tagore believes is the reason for India's present helplessness against the British. He very eloquently uses the metaphor of youth to show that the India's rigid social systems did not impede her development initially and that their ill effects were felt only afterwards. Tagore points out that the negative effects of one's bad habits are not felt immediately especially when one is in vigor of their youth. It is only felt, once bad habits

start consuming the vigor, setting in a gradual decline. Tagore says that, “India also in the heyday of her youth could carry in her vital organs the dead weight of her social organizations stiffened to rigid perfection, but it has been fatal to her, and has produced a gradual paralysis of her living nature” (Tagore 111).

Tagore’s biggest concern about Indian nationalism is that it does not focus on these old historical problems of India. According to him the educated Indian is trying to adopt a European history which is not their own. He believes that the whole of East is attempting to borrow a history, which is not the outcome of its own living. He feels that the East is dazzled by the fireworks of the West, without realizing their temporary nature. He very forcefully articulates his arguments here, urging his fellow Indians to follow their own destiny:

In man’s history there come ages of fireworks which dazzle us by their force and movement. They laugh not only at our modest household lamps but also at the eternal stars. But let us not for that provocation be precipitate in our desire to dismiss our lamps. Let us patiently bear our present insult and realize that their fireworks have splendor but not permanence, because of the extreme explosiveness which is the cause of their power, and also of their exhaustion.... Anyhow our ideals have been evolved through our own history and even if we wished we could only make poor fireworks of them, because their materials are different from yours, as is also their moral purpose.... The mistake that we make is in thinking that man’s channel of greatness is only one -- the one which has



made itself painfully evident for the time being by its depth of insolence.

(Tagore 96)

This disassociation with the past and the obsession with Western culture has the negative impact of ignoring the historical problem of the Indian civilization. According to Tagore, the majority of Indians believe that their ancient ancestors completed the constructive work of creating a social and a spiritual ideal and that the social system needs no more work. As he aptly writes about his countrymen:

We never dream of blaming our social inadequacy as the origin for our present helplessness, for we have accepted as the creed of our nationalism that this social system has been perfected for all time to come by our ancestors who had the superhuman vision of all eternity, and supernatural power for making infinite provision for future ages. (Tagore 108)

Therefore for Indians, the reason for their present decline and enslavement is not their social inadequacy but a series of unfortunate historical events that allowed the British to establish themselves in the subcontinent. Indians think that because their social systems were already perfected, they should shift their energies into perfecting the political system, taking their lessons from the West. Tagore thinks that this is delusional and that one cannot “build a political miracle of freedom upon the quicksand of social slavery”(Tagore 109). The weakness that exists in India’s social institutions will reappear in its political institutions. One cannot hope to create just political institutions when society itself has developed tyrannical practices. For Tagore moral freedom is more

important than political freedom because the latter does not necessarily free our minds from social tyranny. Tagore articulates this argument as follows:

The social habit of mind which impels us to make the life of our fellow-beings a burden to them where they differ from us even in such a thing as their choice of food is sure to persist in our political organization and result in creating engines of coercion to crush every rational difference which is the sign of life. And tyranny will only add to the inevitable lies and hypocrisy in our political life. Is the mere name of freedom so valuable that we should be willing to sacrifice for its sake our moral freedom? (Tagore 110)

Furthermore Tagore argues that India's ancient problem is now the biggest challenge confronting the whole world. India is many countries combined into one geographical unit; the exact opposite of what Europe was, namely one unit divided into many countries. In ancient times, it was easy to keep the geographical distinction in the rest of the world. However due to technology, all races of men in the world have come in closer contact. And now the question arises "whether the different groups of peoples shall go on fighting with one another or find out some true basis of reconciliation and mutual help; whether it will be interminable competition or cooperation" (Tagore 88). Tagore argues that though man possesses self-love that leads to conflict, it is man's higher instincts of mutual help and sympathy that lead to the establishment of civilization. He believes that the organization of Nationalism that thrives on conflict and competition will

not help solve the world's present problem. It will be solved only if the world follows its higher nature of spiritual unity and common humanity. Tagore believes that "there is a future before us and that future is waiting for those who are rich in moral ideals and not in mere things" (Tagore 96).

Therefore for Tagore, India's quest for social stability gains more importance because of its potential impact on the world. If India, in its delusional nationalistic jingoism, fails to first solve the race problem and focuses instead on creating political organization, not only will it create an unjust society based on tyrannical social principles but it will also miss an opportunity to fulfill its moral purpose and contribute to the greater good of humanity. As Tagore succinctly summarizes India's purpose:

In finding the solution of our problem we shall have helped to solve the world problem as well. What India has been, the whole world is now. The whole world is becoming one country through scientific facility. And the moment is arriving when you also must find a basis of unity which is not political. If India can offer to the world her solution, it will be a contribution to humanity. There is only one history- the history of man. All national histories are merely chapters in the larger one. And we are content in India to suffer for such a great cause. (Tagore 87)

### ***Conclusion***

For Tagore, the future of India has to account for its historical problem. India has to refocus on the "samāj" (society) instead of chasing its new obsession with the "rashtra"(nation). This longing for the renovated past that addresses its social

inadequacies but remains fluid in its understanding of life, for an India abounding with creative and spiritual energy, is perfectly encapsulated in Tagore's viraha as described by Vajpeyi in her analysis of Tagore's literary work. Tagore longs for an "India, of about fifty centuries at least, who tried to live peacefully and think deeply, the India devoid of all politics, the India of no nations, whose one ambition has been to know this world as of soul, to live here every moment of her life in the meek spirit of adoration, in the glad consciousness of an eternal and personal relationship with it" (Tagore 6). Furthermore in a world connected through technology and commerce, Tagore's idea of samāj (society) expands to include not just the Indian-subcontinent but also the rest of humanity. For Tagore world society will progress if it does not engage in conflict fostered by narrow self-interest and national love, but instead focuses on man's higher nature of cooperation and mutual respect. India's mission, according to Tagore is to be the epitome of this higher nature despite the allure of West's transient prosperity. Only by following this path, will India fulfill its destiny and contribute to the world samāj (society).

## **Chapter 4- The Beginning**

In this brief chapter I will show an application of Sen's Open Impartiality approach by analyzing themes that are shared by both Gandhi and Tagore in the previous chapter. I am not claiming that the end result will be comprehensive or even completely accurate. It is a thought-experiment with many potential solutions based on different readings of the founders. In an ideal world, Sen's approach would be best conducted using the tool of public reasoning and discussion. Therefore in that case, Tagore and Gandhi would engage in open dialogue and seek to establish common grounds of understanding. In the present scenario it is impossible to conduct or accurately capture that process of engagement. Therefore for the purpose of this paper I am seeking on capturing certain aspects of the common ground that could be established between these visionaries. The aim of this common ground is not to be all-inclusive and completely precise, but rather to be illuminating enough to provide a starting point for Indians to start a larger conversation. Therefore the exercise is conducted to highlight the potential that Sen's approach can have. I will conclude by stressing the meaning and the importance of an inclusive approach like the Open Impartiality approach, and by using the common ground established by Tagore and Gandhi as the method to provoke a deeper engagement to address India's present predicaments.

### **Gandhi and Tagore: Common Ground**

The purpose of this section is to create a scenario where Sen's Open Impartiality approach can be applied to find some common ground between different views. In this

case I am using the views of two founders of India, who had different visions of India to see what they agreed on when they envisioned Indian identity. The question is: what were some views which both Gandhi and Tagore shared when they thought about being Indian?

First, for our purpose it is interesting to note that both these founders rejected the nation as the end goal, as the telos for India's political liberation. While Tagore was more outspoken about his contempt for nationalism, even Gandhi was skeptical of the bureaucratic and institutionalized nation state. For both of them the upliftment of the Samāj or the broader society was the end goal of India's fight for liberation. The Samāj and not the Rashtra was the focus for "Purna Swaraj" (Complete Self-Rule). Therefore creating the nation-state of India from British India was not the end vision of these founders.

Second, they put a lot of focus on the growth and development of the individual. Gandhi's emphasis on Ahimsa was based on self-cultivation and self-control of the ideals of non-violence as espoused in the Gita. While it seems Tagore focuses exclusively on Samāj, he recognizes the diversity present in human nature, acknowledging the importance of each individuals. For both of them to liberate Samāj, individuals have to be given the freedom to cultivate certain qualities and liberate themselves.

Third, both of them shared similar ideas of what these qualities were that needed to be cultivated in individuals for their liberation. Both of them attached an ethical and a spiritual connotation to the qualities that individuals were to develop. They completely rejected Western notions of self-love, arguing for the growth of higher human instincts of sympathy and mutual cooperation. While Tagore whole-heartedly believed in Ahimsa,

Gandhi was a proponent of the spiritual unity of all human beings. Both believed that the spiritual liberation of the individual would lead to the liberation of society.

Fourth, both derived their visions from India's past. They used terms that were available in Indic philosophy and reinvented them to rejuvenate a population uncertain of its own heritage. They also vehemently opposed many Western concepts, especially the ones that they felt were harming people by promoting colonization all over the world. In their rejection of Western ideas, however they are unanimous in accepting the shared humanity of the people of the West and leaving room for incorporating the good from Western tradition. Their main focus though is still the Indic thought from where they derive their core philosophies.

Lastly both the founders are exceptional in their vision of India because they imagine an inclusive India. Their vision makes room for India's diversity and indeed promotes it as an important goal for a just Indian society. This focus on incorporating diversity and providing a potential solution for India's race problem is powerful and makes these visionaries exceptional.

### **The Conclusion: the "Righteous Republic"**

I want to conclude this paper by reiterating the crisis that the Indian state is experiencing. India's democracy, due to its diverse social character and its inability to reconcile this diversity, is being held hostage to vested interests. It has developed into the most primitive form of democracy, a tyranny of majority rule where strength lies purely in numbers. India is considered the largest democracy in the world, but that is simply

because it conducts the largest ballot exercise in the world. This niti-centered approach of democracy that focuses on organizational institutions is neither complete nor sufficient for the effective and just conduct of a true democracy.

Democracy in its true form also incorporates the idea of public reasoning and discussion. John Stuart Mills famously proclaimed that a true democracy is a “government by discussion” (Sen 326). India in its present form is not able to provide a common political platform for its different people to engage in meaningful public discussion. The institutions that India has set up to facilitate deliberation are being abused by various interest groups with their own particular agendas. Therefore India needs to find a way to establish a platform that is not handicapped by India’s inherent social diversity. Sen provides us with a potential solution through his Open Impartiality approach. His approach not only facilitates deliberation but it provides a common political platform by incorporating the differences in various social groups. Therefore social diversity becomes an asset instead of a liability in fostering meaningful discussion in Sen’s model.

Sen’s model, however could potentially be hard to initiate. For that purpose I have attempted to apply the model to find some initial common ground in the vision that India’s founders envisioned. This common vision, while not comprehensive, seeks to provide an initial start that can provoke a larger application of Sen’s Open Impartiality approach. The theme that is shared by the founders revolves around how they envisioned India’s place in the world as the moral compass of the globe, as the “Righteous Republic.” Ananya Vajpeyi describes this shared vision as follows:



The righteous republic is a separate place, a repository of certain norms and values whose traces we may find even today in postcolonial India— norms and values without which it becomes impossible to either establish India's distinct historical identity in the world or justify its abiding claim to moral authority in the global community... (The founders) created the ground upon which India stands—a solid plinth of moral selfhood and ethical sovereignty, absent which India is nothing more than the token of a type, a nation among nations, with no special contribution to human history. (Vajpeyi 10)

This shared vision can perhaps provide the tools to begin the engagement between the various communities in India. It can be used to address the potential crisis that is brewing in the country. If no action is taken then soon India would disintegrate into various smaller nations. This will deprive India not only of the opportunity to achieve its destiny but also the chance to contribute to greater humanity. It will deprive India of being the Righteous Republic. Sen proposes a solution that if based on the vision of Indian founders, can potentially avert this tragedy.

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