MAHATMA GANDHI'S CONSTRUCTIVE PROGRAMME: BUILDING A NEW INDIA

BY

ALLWYN TELLIS

B.A, University of Bombay, 1986
L.L.B., University of Bombay, 1993
M.S., Radford University, 1998

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Speech Communication
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2006

Urbana, Illinois

CERTIFICATE OF COMMITTEE APPROVAL

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Graduate College

July 27, 2005

We hereby recommend that the thesis by:

ALLYWN TELLIS

Entitled:

MAHATMA GANDHI'S CONSTRUTIVE PROGRAMME:
BUILDING A NEW INDIA

Be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of:

Doctor of Philosophy

Signatures:

Director of Research - Thomas Conley

Head of Department - Barbara J. Wilson

Committee on Final Examination*

Chairperson - Thomas Conley

Committee Member - David Prochaska

Committee Member - Cara A. Finnegan

Committee Member -

Committee Member - Stephen J. Hartnett

Committee Member -

* Required for doctoral degree but not for master's degree

ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I have examined a largely ignored but vital aspect of Mahatma Gandhi's public career—his constructive program. He coined this term after he returned to India for good, using it to refer to a range of programs and practices whereby he hoped to radically reorient Indians physically, psychologically, socially, economically, politically, and spiritually to achieve "true freedom" not only from British rule, but from modernity as well. Arguing that attention to this aspect of Gandhi's project should not be limited to the pamphlet (of the same name) he wrote in 1941, I have traced the constructive program as a body of discourse comprising speeches, correspondence, interviews, editorials, and pamphlets addressed to various audiences, at different times, and for different purposes. I approach the constructive program as a grassroots social movement aimed at national reconstruction and reorientation that was an integral part of Gandhi's nationalist movement and more important than Gandhi's nonviolent campaigns against injustice and exploitation (satyagraha). The constructive program influenced Indian politics and nation-building in the first half of the twentieth century as much as satyagraha.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

REVISITING GANDHI

In a three-part series of articles beginning in September 2006, The New York Times documented the severe crisis in water supply that India has been facing for several decades and that threatens to only get worse as the population increases, the available resources shrink, and the powers that be remain hopelessly ill-equipped and often callously indifferent. The opening article calls attention to the Indian government's "astonishing inability to deliver the most basic services to its citizens at a time when India asserts itself as a global power."[1] This doomsday scenario can be extrapolated onto other basic services such as food supply, air quality, sanitation, health, education, and shelter. As India emerges as a promising "tiger" in the twenty-first century global economy, the majority of her population still leads a subhuman existence forever poised on the brink of epidemics, famines, and genocidal conflicts.

It seems that Mahatma Gandhi's dire warning that a modernizing India could hope, at best, to be a "fifth edition of Europe and America" is becoming increasingly apparent. While boasting the trappings of a twenty-first century economy and proclaiming itself the largest democracy in the world, never before have so many millions of Indians been marginalized and alienated from the official frameworks of the state, political economy, and civil society. The indictments and reprimands that Gandhi hurled at the British Empire—the "Kingdom of Satan on Earth"—can be aimed with greater vehemence at the postcolonial Republic of India. Yet, every year, Gandhi Day is

[1] Sengupta

celebrated with a national holiday, prayer meetings, ritual spinning bees, public sanitation drives, and the garlanding of statues of the mahatma (great soul) or bapu (father) all over the country.

The state is preoccupied with its pursuit of superpower status in terms of economic, technological, and military might and pays more attention to achievements in nuclear science and space exploration than the provision of basic amenities to the exploded population. Politics remains a ruthless high-stakes game in which the ordinary citizen is no more than a pawn to be bribed or intimidated. The social fabric remains threadbare and stretched, ready to rip in countless places along the lines of religion, caste, region, and language. Civil society is still dominated by elites who do not identify with the majority of their compatriots and are obsessed with keeping up with the fashions and indulgences of the developed world. And so, sixty years after independence, the majority of Indians still find themselves where Gandhi discovered them on his first tour of India in 1914, in hundreds of thousands of "dung heaps," wallowing in a subhuman existence of poverty, brutality, and vice.

On the other hand, there have never been so many individuals and associations working among and with dispossessed Indians. Countless social workers, activists, NGOs, religious organizations, aid agencies, and development foundations are devoted to studying and ameliorating the crushing problems that most Indians face. While many of these agencies work to include more Indians within the framework of the state and the formal political economy, a growing discourse has emerged around topics such as the "enfranchisement," "empowerment," and "mobilization" of the marginalized to resist the encroachment and exploitation of the state and global economy that they can never hope

to be a part of. There is also growing discussion about ways and means to evolve alternative models of "sustainable development" and environmentally friendly "life support systems" that would allow those categorically excluded from the state and the global economy to meet their basic needs on their own.

Gandhi gradually moved, over the five decades of his public career, from a position at the very center of Pax Britannica and modern civilization, further and further away, until he arrived at a place absolutely outside its reach. He began his involvement in politics as a loyal imperialist in late nineteenth and early twentieth century South Africa and India, petitioning for a more conscientious and scrupulous implementation of Queen Victoria's Proclamation of 1858 (guaranteeing equity and justice to all Indians as subjects of the British Empire). In 1919, however, he promised Indians political sovereignty in one year if they would follow him in a campaign of nonviolent non-cooperation but soon realized Indians were not capable of the requisite nonviolence or the subsequent discipline and competence needed for self-rule. Another failed attempt at nonviolent civil disobedience in the 1930s proved that Indians still had a long way to go before they could shake off British rule and constitute a viable nation. Provincial self-rule in 1937 led to Gandhi's complete disillusionment with representative politics and complete distrust in the ability of Indian nationalists to work together to constitute India into an independent, self-reliant, and self-determining nation that would include all her citizens within an equitable and regenerative nationhood. From 1937 onwards, after he resigned from the Congress, he worked more intensely to develop his constructive program—the positive dimension of his movement that focused on individual and communitarian discipline and service—into a platform comprising an alternative

political, economic, and social praxis that would exist without any reference to the state, the official political economy, and modern civil society.

Gandhi saw clearly, beginning in 1937, that the new rulers of India (whoever they may be) would perpetuate the modernist and imperialist policies and politics of Pax Britannica and that the majority of Indians would remain marginalized, impoverished, and exploited or ignored. He spent the last decade of his life desperately trying to garner support for his constructive program from all constituencies, but especially from educated Indians and Indian nationalists, particularly the Congress. Towards the end of his life, he acknowledged his failure to raise enough interest in and commitment to his doomed project but urged his followers to continue their seemingly hopeless quest as it was the only way they could hope to reach hundreds of millions of Indians who would never have a place in the new republic.

Even today, for hundreds of millions of Indians, the formal political economy of the Republic of India, its institutions and structures, its accomplishments and promises, hold out no hope. Could these people live human lives in spite of their terminal marginalization? Would they ever have a chance of integration with their more fortunate compatriots? Could the Indian state and political economy ever be made to attend to these millions and accommodate them? Could all this be done nonviolently and without huge infusions of resources and expertise from the outside? Gandhi insisted, throughout his career, that all these goals were possible and desirable. He tirelessly held out his constructive program as the means to strive towards their achievement. Insisting that it was not a panacea for all ills, and could not give everyone everything they wanted, he maintained that it was the only way that Indians could work towards building a nation in

which they could live nonviolently and equitably and constitute a model that might inspire the rest of the world. He was dismissed as a Luddite and a utopian dreamer by most of his contemporaries who were optimistic that modernization, rationalization, and technological innovation would provide the means to obtain what they wanted. Today, fewer people are willing to laugh off Gandhi's warnings and admonitions even if they are not willing to follow his prescriptions. In any case, the largest and longest lasting of Gandhi's experiments with truth, the constructive program, is worth revisiting if only in the hope that we might find Gandhi's efforts at pursuing a seemingly hopeless goal with optimism, born of a belief in human ingenuity and the magical power unleashed by unstinting personal commitment and communitarian solidarity, heuristically stimulating. Yet another Revisionist Reading of Gandhi?

The "Gandhi Industry," that began during his lifetime, has grown phenomenally since Gandhi's assassination in 1948 and now spans several disciplines and fields. Over the past two decades, in particular, scholars have attended to diverse aspects of Gandhi's project beyond well-worn topics such as his method of satyagraha (nonviolent resistance), his mass campaigns of civil disobedience directed against British rule and indigenous interests, and his observations on issues regarding religion and ethics. And yet, a major dimension of Gandhi's project—the prime concern throughout his public career in South Africa and India—has received scant scholarly attention: his constructive program.

From the earliest phase of his activist career (as a champion of the civil rights of expatriate Indians in South Africa), Gandhi maintained that Indians should complement their "external" struggle for civil rights and enfranchisement with an "internal" struggle

entailing introspection and reform in matters pertaining to their physiological, psychological, social, economic, political, religious, and moral welfare. He insisted that the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of Indians' external struggle resulted largely from the poor state of their internal health—individual, communitarian, and national.

Gandhi's sensational satyagraha campaigns, through which he nonviolently confronted the British Empire and indigenous vested interests, have understandably received close and sustained attention. His tedious and often invisible efforts at motivating, empowering, and reorienting three hundred million men, women, and children, exploited and brutalized for centuries, through loosely organized, non-programmatic, local initiatives, has received little attention. In this study, I begin the process of revisiting the constructive program, the little-known but integral component of Gandhi's nationalist movement. I set out on this enterprise with the conviction that the constructive program should properly be fundamentally reconsidered as a parallel discourse (to satyagraha) that pervaded Gandhi's movement from its inception, rather than a sketchy utopian fantasy (articulated in a hastily written pamphlet) held out as a last resort towards the end of his career. To that extent, my study is revisionist.

However, what I advocate is not a revisionism that denounces "outdated" understandings of Gandhi's movement and promotes an updated "truer" version. Rather, I suggest that, to more fully understand Gandhi's career and influence, we need to go beyond his confrontation of Pax Britannica and attend to his efforts at promoting an agenda of radical restructuring that went beyond formal politics and aimed at transforming all aspects of the private and public life of India's millions. In revisiting Gandhi's constructive program thus, we might come (as historians) to better grasp the

scope of Gandhi's movement, appreciate its role in and significance for Indian nationalism, and gauge the nature and extent of its legacy. More significantly, for me, Gandhi's project presents an immense archive of compelling rhetorical artifacts that would reward rhetoricians with insights into critical issues related to rhetorical practice, criticism, theory, and pedagogy. Some of the most obviously promising of these issues, that I attend to in this dissertation, are the impact of Gandhi's movement on nationalism, citizenship, leadership, the public sphere, and civic action.

The Rhetorical Dimension of Gandhi's Constructive Program

Public address—oral and written—was crucially important to Gandhi's movement in spite of his frequent dismissal of it as a dubious and ineffective form of political action. Throughout his career and, especially, through his constructive program, Gandhi attempted to initiate revolutionary change at several levels—individual, interpersonal, communitarian, regional, national, and international—while categorically condemning violence of all kinds. He criticized not only the unilateralism and violence of British (and indigenous) imperialism, but also the ruthless competitiveness of modern nationalism, the divisive conflicts of identity politics, and the disempowerment and alienation fostered by global capitalism and materialistic individualism. Throughout his career, Gandhi tried to claim and open up physical and rhetorical spaces—separate from the state, the modern economy, and the institutions of modern civil society—where those marginalized and exploited by imperialism, industrial capitalism, and modernity might engage in "direct action" to better their own lives in accordance with their own aspirations. Gandhi called upon nationalists to work towards building a political system that would integrate diverse

peoples, a political agenda that would include popular needs and aspirations, and a political praxis that would include various forms of human agency.

Through his constructive program, Gandhi attempted to initiate a nonviolent but radical transformation of the lived experience of ordinary Indians—beginning at the level of the individual and moving into ever-widening social formations. In so doing, he was faced with a bewildering plethora of rhetorical exigencies and audiences. He had to field compelling demands and inducements from various agents of modernity: the imperial establishment, its indigenous allies, nationalists, religious fundamentalists, commercial and industrial interests, the modern professions, and a growing urban working class. He had to re-conceive the nation, redefine citizenship, revise the national agenda, reorient various constituencies and institutions, generate new publics, harmonize diverse and often irreconcilable interests, allot roles and responsibilities to volunteers, and manage ambitions, rivalries, and incompatibilities (often within his own movement).

Gandhi deployed a rich repertoire of rhetorical resources as he prosecuted the constructive program, problematizing existing ideas and practices and inventing new ones. Bhikhu Parekh, a critical biographer of Gandhi, explains how the rhetorical aspects of Gandhi's project contributed significantly to its nature and effectiveness:

> Gandhi had mastered the indigenous style of symbolic discourse [that] was familiar to his audience...[He] confused and marginalized the foreign rulers and created a private space in which he could carry on a public conversation with his countrymen in relative privacy. He not only invented and used symbols but became one himself, and his manner of dressing, walking, talking, eating, sleeping, sitting, raising his index finger and the choice of sites for his ashrams

> [communes] tapped deep historical memories. The symbols were both packed with and went beyond arguments, and both explained situations and stirred people into action. They gave Gandhi's message a power no other form of discourse could have given.[2]

Parekh has offered a deeply insightful explication of Gandhi's ideological contributions to colonial Indians' consciousness, identity, self-esteem, and aspirations. What is missing from his critique of Gandhi's movement and legacy is an explication of the utterances, performances, and practices whereby Gandhi actually exercised this phenomenal influence. In this dissertation, focusing on the long-neglected second dimension (parallel to satyagraha) of Gandhi's movement—his constructive program, I set out to identify and outline the broad, deep, and lasting changes Gandhi effected in India's political (rhetorical) culture and practice.

Through his twin initiatives of satyagraha and the constructive program, Gandhi managed to transform the nationalist movement from an elite bargaining game (a small clique of English-educated Indians petitioning for reforms within the framework of Pax Britannica) into a mass movement that not only rendered British rule increasingly unsustainable, but seriously eroded its credibility, legitimacy, and moral certitude. Moreover, he also compelled Indian nationalists to reinvent themselves as agents (free citizens rather than imperial subjects), to claim a vastly different agency than what they were allowed under the imperial system, and to reinvent India as a nation that would be free from the imperatives not only of British imperialism but also of modernity and global capitalism.

---

[2] Gandhi's Political Philosophy 207

Mainly through the constructive program, Gandhi challenged the strategic public-private dichotomy that the colonial state had gradually constructed through its legal and administrative system, institutions, policies, and practices, and that was vital to the maintenance of its hegemonic power. In the process, he reclaimed certain areas of public life as private or communitarian concerns (such as medicine, education, and civil law) and publicized/politicized many areas of private life (such as diet, clothing, occupation, and sexuality) as vital sites of political engagement. He also problematized modern institutions such as civil society and representative democracy, insisting that citizens should participate in the public sphere—forums of deliberation and decision-making—for the most part through "direct action." Through campaigns of resistance and sustained social service within their local communities, ordinary Indians could take charge of their own lives and welfare rather than surrender themselves to the machinations of inefficient and ineffective partisan politics and the labyrinthine and inaccessible institutions and associations of the modern state and civil society.

Gandhi redefined many aspects of rhetorical culture, such as nationhood, citizenship, leadership, political action, and civic participation. He invited the diverse masses of the Indian subcontinent to identify with one another as citizens of a nation defined in terms of shared morals and values and appealed for their devoted commitment to common ideals and goals. He rejected cultural homogeneity, religious affiliation, economic interest, or political expediency as acceptable bases of national integrity.

Gandhi redefined the concept of leadership by the very manner in which he conducted himself vis-à-vis his supporters. As Susanne Rudolph notes,

Unlike a more rigorously ideological leader, who might expect the human

> material with which he deals with to adapt itself rather precisely to his movement's normative and behavioral requirements, Gandhi was strongly attuned to the varying inner states and potentialities of his followers. A movement leader committed to shaping men, he suited the shaping to the characterological contours of his followers, sensitive to the limits of their adaptability. This was not invariably true...Nonetheless, it was a distinguishing mark of his leadership.[3]

And, thus, the concept and practice of followership were also transformed. In his satyagraha campaigns (with their great potential for mob violence) Gandhi demanded strict adherence to a set of rules he stipulated. Outside of these limited campaigns, and in his constructive program in particular, Gandhi urged supporters to join him as fellow "experimenters in truth" to individually, collectively, and cumulatively question and reform their beliefs, attitudes, and practices with a view to bringing them more in keeping with the values of nonviolence, justice, and public service.

Finally, through the constructive program, Gandhi transformed the notion of civic discourse. As Ainslee Embree notes, "[t]he constitutional gradualism of the pioneers [of Indian nationalism] foreclosed participation in a whole range of political activity."[4] Beginning in 1919, however, Gandhi threw open the arena of political participation to the masses at large, incorporating within its radically revised rubric a wide range of actions—symbolic, ritualistic, and pragmatic—that did not rely upon standardized, institutionalized, professionalized, commercialized, and bureaucratized structures and procedures, or purely rational-discursive practices and formalities that excluded and exploited the vast majority of Indians.

---

[3] "Gandhi's Lieutenants" 41-2
[4] Embree 63

Gandhi introduced novel concepts and practices into the rhetorical culture of Indian politics or radically modified existing ones: a diverse but integrated agenda of revolutionary socio-economic reform to be prosecuted at the local level; an organically "national" economy and polity that linked local bodies and initiatives to regional and then sub-continental ones; radically innovative ideographs such as "experimentation" and "trusteeship" to characterize governance; and direct involvement of the masses in public deliberation and decision-making in their local communities. To accomplish the last, Gandhi simply suggested various initiatives of public service (components of his constructive program) as the proper means of national regeneration even as he shunned centralized, coercive, and bureaucratic programs initiated from "above." While suggesting several courses of action to be pursued simultaneously within the rubric of his constructive program, Gandhi left the people free to decide how they would participate in it—what they would attempt and to what extent they would commit themselves.

Using the ideograph (metaphor) of experimentation, Gandhi stressed the tentative and ever-evolving character of his project. Moreover, he sought to confront oppression and exploitation throughout the nation but the initiatives would always have to originate at the local level and would have to focus on individual and communal attempts to alter or reinvent primary relationships and routine practices—the only appropriate sites for a grassroots program of radical but nonviolent reform. Such a comprehensive and provisional agenda could not be articulated in terms of discrete goals and specific plans of action, nor could any single person or group claim exclusive authorship or control of such a movement. Opportunism (the creative perception and exploitation of opportunities to ameliorate the status quo) and improvisation (constant self-reflexive

critique and sharing of experiences and insights among volunteers) would have to be the key elements of such a project. Moreover, he set up ashrams (communes) that were different from the traditional monastic abodes of seclusion and meditation to serve, instead, as "training institutes" where new volunteers would be oriented to the principles and methods of satyagraha, as well as "laboratories" where volunteer workers would conduct experiments aimed at improving individual and collective discipline and civic participation through public service.

Gandhi insisted that leaders of satyagraha campaigns and volunteers in the constructive program would have to embody the key tenets of these enterprises in their persons, in their day-to-day routines and practices, in their relationships with others, and in their public service. Moreover, true independence (not just political sovereignty) could not simply be demanded from the imperial power and its indigenous collaborators, nor could it be obtained through the efforts of a few nationalist politicians however competent, but would have to be claimed by enacting and exercising it in their individual and communitarian life by the hundreds of millions of Indians.

Finally, Gandhi utilized several rituals and ceremonies to promote an empowered political consciousness and solidarity among the masses who would have little place in formal politics even after independence. For example, as Embree notes,

> In a country of extraordinary diversity...[t]he spinning of thread might not do much to alter economic conditions, but the experience of working together in great mass meetings gave people an exhilarating sense of participation in the political process.[5]

[5] Embree 68

Thus, although some of the public rituals that Gandhi initiated (such as spinning, wearing clothing made of homemade textiles, cleaning public places, and participating in public prayer meetings) might seem inane and superficial, they helped millions of isolated and alienated individuals and communities to become conscious of a common predicament and purpose as well as a means of working with one another within the nationalist movement and the constructive program.

For all the above reasons, and more, the study of Gandhi's project from a rhetorical perspective promises to be greatly rewarding, yielding insights into myriad aspects of rhetorical practice, theory, criticism, and pedagogy. To mention just a few, Gandhi's project is a site replete with instances of individual and mass activism, nonviolent conflict resolution, charismatic and non-coercive leadership, invitational rhetoric, nonverbal argument, cross-cultural communication, community building, peaceable nationalism, multiple and compatible citizenships, and education for citizenship and civic participation. While I do briefly attend to some of these issues in this dissertation, they largely remain a compelling agenda for future research.

Scholarly Attention to Gandhi's Rhetoric

In 1972, Judith Brown presented an overview of the secondary literature on Gandhi and his movement that can be regarded as a valid characterization even today:

> Most [authors have] set out to produce straight biographies, psychological studies, or assessments of Gandhi as moralist, political philosopher, social worker, exponent of passive resistance and the like. Few [have] analysed Gandhi's role in Indian politics or explored the actual mechanisms whereby he emerged from obscurity to a dramatic assertion of power in 1920, and thereafter to leadership of

the nationalist struggle against the raj [British rule].[6]

Since 1972, however, some scholars have undertaken a critical, historicized examination of sections of the vast body of oral and written discourse that attended Gandhi's movement as well as some nonverbal and performative elements that marked that discourse. However, they have largely focused on his satyagrahas campaigns. This section outlines a few of the more prominent scholarly critiques of the rhetorical aspects of Gandhi's movement.

Attending to key terminology in Gandhi's nationalist messages, G. Aloysius charges Gandhi with leaving his definition of swaraj (self-rule) "delightfully vague" on purpose,[7] a concept that "was apparently everything for everybody, without actually disturbing anybody...[that] deflect[ed] the course of political awakening from the hard world of the economic and political to the nebulous and the mysterious."[8] He accuses Gandhi of having defended establishmentarian interests through a ruthless manipulation of the less powerful sections of society as, with incredible mastery, he hijacked the peasantry, utilized them temporarily to achieve goals useful to the bourgeoisie and, finally, abandoned them. In doing so, Aloysius has paid exclusive attention to the mass mobilization efforts that Gandhi initiated from time to time—including his three major campaigns of 1920-22, 1928-31, and 1942-44. He has ignored the other crucial component of Gandhi's career—the constructive program. It was through this program that Gandhi sought to initiate radical change in agents, relationships, agendas, and agencies. It was through the constructive program that Gandhi reached out to

---

[6] Gandhi's Rise xiv
[7] Aloysius 180
[8] Aloysius 180

constituencies historically excluded from participation in public affairs—peasants, untouchables, women, industrial laborers, and students. In this dissertation, I set out to reclaim this vast body of discourse that crucially influenced Gandhi's movement but that has been largely ignored by even the most dedicated Gandhi scholars.

Evaluating the role that Gandhi's movement played in the larger nationalist movement in India, Partha Chatterjee lauds his definitive role in nation-building:

> The 'science of non-violence' was the form in which Gandhism addressed itself to the problematic of nationalism...to provide answers to the problems of national politics, of concretizing the nation as an active historical subject rejecting the domination of a foreign power, of devising its political organization and the strategic and tactical principles of its struggle. In its specific historical effectivity, Gandhism provided for the first time in Indian politics an ideological basis for including the whole people within the political nation.[9]

Gandhi's project was, indeed, more comprehensive and inclusive than that of any other nationalist leader or party. However, it did not solely (or even mainly) attempt to provide answers to the problems of modern nationalist politics. Rather, Gandhi contributed most significantly to the Indian nationalist movement by expanding its agenda (far beyond the limited demands for gradual and moderate constitutional reforms) and by initiating new platforms of direct popular action (satyagrahas in various forms and several initiatives under the constructive program). Through this strategy, he compelled the imperial establishment and modern Indian nationalists to come to terms with many social, economic, and political issues that were hitherto neglected or deliberately ignored.

---

[9] Chatterjee 110

Chatterjee goes on to state that India's attainment of independence from Britain short-circuited Gandhi's larger nation-building enterprise by depriving it of its raison d'etre:

> Gandhism as a political ideology...was no longer able to specify concretely the modalities of implementing [its ideal] as a viable political practice. Now that there were powerful and organized interests within the nation which clearly did not share the belief in the Gandhian ideal, there was no way in which the Gandhian ideology could identify a social force which would carry forward the struggle.[10]

Like Aloysius and many Gandhi scholars[11], Chatterjee apprehends Gandhi's movement only to the extent that it participated in the formal politics of the Indian nationalist struggle and, inevitably, he must conclude that it was a failure. But Gandhi's constructive program worked entirely outside such a limited arena and aimed at organizing and empowering the vast marginalized remainders of the imperial (and postcolonial) state. It invited its participants to adopt revolutionary subjectivities, participate in unprecedented public spaces, devise radical agendas, exercise innovative agencies, and enact empowering citizenships. Only a closer examination of the impact of the constructive program during Gandhi's life time and that of the various surviving Gandhians and Gandhisms all over the world could seriously address the issue of the success or failure of Gandhi's movement and the nature and endurance of its lingering influence.

---

[10] Chatterjee 117

[11] Other scholars that seem to concur with Chatterjee's critique, and that I have attended to in this study, include S.S. Gill, Dennis Dalton, B.R. Nanda, and Judith Brown.

S.S. Gill concedes that Gandhi, through his constructive program, aimed at changing the "objective conditions of...existence" of the majority of impoverished Indians, but charges that "it relied for success on the voluntary effort of dedicated workers and the goodwill of the 'haves'[while] the desired beneficiaries like the Untouchables and the agricultural and factory workers were never made active agents of the desired transformation, [and so] they never got empowered."[12] Thus, the constructive program "could never acquire an autonomous momentum to snap its paternalistic apron strings."[13] However, rather than merely helping "desired beneficiaries," the constructive program aimed at more fundamental and radical outcomes—the transformation of agents, social relations, and political enterprises and the evolution of innovative and nonviolent agencies that would work for a more humane society, economy, and polity at the level of the local community. The "desired transformation" had to be conceived of and pursued by the agents themselves. Attending to the vast rhetorical archive of the constructive program, I have identified numerous messages in which Gandhi exhorts his associates and correspondents to "experiment" in self-discipline and social service and share their accomplishments and failures. The massive and complex collection of texts in Gandhi's Collected Works are proof that Gandhi indeed did reach out to untouchables, and agricultural and factory workers with a view to empowering them and drawing them into the movement for independence and national regeneration.

Dennis Dalton sees Gandhi's constructive program as a desperate afterthought that Gandhi resigned himself to after his influence in formal politics waned. He dismisses it as a safer and lesser alternative to the more important but dangerous task of

[12] Gill 227
[13] Gill 227

formal political struggle against the imperial power and elite indigenous interests and does not regard the program as an integral and crucial dimension of Gandhi's movement:

> Gandhi's faith in mass civil disobedience...was considerably shaken in [the 1922 non-cooperation movement] by several acts of violence...[and] his use of civil disobedience after 1922 grew even more controlled and restricted, subject to careful planning and orchestration...After the noncooperation movement's first flush, then, Gandhi turned increasingly to social reform.[14]

Dalton also notes that many of the issues within the constructive program "had been championed before by social reformers" and that "Gandhi's contribution was, as a national political leader, to insist that these reforms were integral components of swaraj itself."[15] Such a view belies the historical record of Gandhi's project in which one can see Gandhi alternating mass activist campaigns with attention to constructive enterprises beginning in South Africa. His decision to pursue an activist or constructive initiative at any given time depended on his interpretation of the prevailing situation and his intuitive judgment as to the best choice of arena and action rather than any consideration of the success or failure of a particular campaign.

Joseph Prabhu identifies Gandhi's philosophy of peace as the essence of his movement. He claims that there are "four elements of [Gandhi's] wide-ranging philosophy of peace":

> (1) his critique of modernity and the values and institutions it promoted; (2) his alternative modernity that embodied a different set of values and ideals; (3) his focus on civil society as the agency that might forge and implement this

---

[14] Dalton 47-8
[15] Dalton 26-7

alternative modernity; and finally, (4) the revisions in conventional ideas of religion and politics that this new vision entailed.[16]

In this characterization of Gandhi's project we see an emphasis on Gandhi's ideas and ideals rather than on his policies and practices and the opportunities, motivations, constraints, and dynamics that informed those historical actions.

Surprisingly, Prabhu also asserts that "Gandhi's was [an] Aristotelian picture of politics as a practical art that involved deliberation in the public sphere about matters of common concern."[17] This observation is puzzling given Gandhi's constant emphasis on direct involvement of the "dumb" millions in public service (an emphasis on performance and embodiment as the best forms of public deliberation and action) and his sweeping dismissal of rational-critical discourse as pointless wrangling about abstract constitutional provisions and institutional structures and procedures. Specifically, in his pamphlet, Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place (1941, 1945), Gandhi dismisses "oratory so called" as a futile endeavor and promotes social service in the villages as the best way by which aspiring leaders could promote public welfare.

Prabhu also states that, in Gandhian politics, "civil society—the space of people's organizations, which come together around various initiatives...assumes great significance."[18] But, from various utterances throughout his movement, it is obvious that Gandhi actually sought to go beyond the complex and remote institutions and associations of modern civil society. He acknowledged that modern civil society was ameliorative of some of the inadequacies and shortcomings of the modern state, but

[16] Prabhu 2
[17] Prabhu 2
[18] Prabhu 2

maintained that it was still inadequate for the achievement of true swaraj because so many millions still lay outside its scope and influence. He stressed the cultivation of discipline at the individual level as the first step in any quest for freedom and autonomy; then, the renegotiation of interpersonal and communitarian relationships to make them more equitable; next, voluntary social service to solve communal problems rather than conventional politicking that involved bargaining, bribery, and coercion; after that, the more formal and permanent institutions of civil society to deal with more complex matters; and, finally, the centralized structures and coercive procedures of the state. It is attention to the constructive program, therefore, that would yield the deepest insights into Gandhian philosophy, ethics, and politics.

Susanne and Lloyd Rudolph consider Gandhi's project in terms of its invisible dimensions, particularly its psychological aspects:

> Gandhi's leadership, regardless of its objective success or failure, had important subjective consequences, repairing wounds in self-esteem, inflicted by generations of imperial subjection, restoring courage and potency, recruiting and mobilizing new constituencies and leaders, helping India to acquire national coherence.[19]

Through the constructive program, Gandhi aimed at achieving outcomes such as those listed above and an exploration of these efforts in their historic specificity and through the rhetorical performances that attended them would yield greater insights into the actual workings and influence of Gandhi's movement. In addition, attention to the constructive program would elucidate how Gandhi's project worked not only to provide psychological

[19] Gandhi 394

and social support to the Indian people, but also to make Indian politics, economics, and society more inclusive and empowering of the common people.

B.R. Nanda notes that satyagraha, Gandhi's "unique method of non-violent resistance to injustice and oppression" allowed him spectacular entry into and eventual domination of Indian nationalist politics.[20] But few scholars posit Nanda's next observation—that satyagraha was the lesser component of Gandhi's project (a tactic to be used sparingly) when compared to the more important constructive program.[21] Nanda also underscores the scant and cursory attention (if not skepticism and downright rejection) that the constructive program received from its very inception, during Gandhi's lifetime, from his contemporaries (and, later, in independent India).

> The British authorities heaved a sigh of relief when he engaged himself in such apparently innocuous activities [as comprised the constructive programme], but it hurt Gandhi when some of his close colleagues missed the significance of the constructive programme and grumbled that it was a distraction from active politics.[22]

Even today, scholars have not paid the constructive program the attention it deserves as the dominant dimension of Gandhi's movement. While Nanda asserts that "Gandhi's apparently apolitical activities...helped bring him close to the masses, thus indirectly making a tremendous contribution to political awakening," he does not specify exactly how this happened and what this tremendous contribution to political awakening

[20] Nanda 7
[21] Nanda 7
[22] Nanda 8

entailed.[23] In this dissertation, I begin the process of elucidating "how" Gandhi's allegedly apolitical activities worked to transform Indian politics and "what" effects they generated.

In his book, Colonialism, Tradition, and Reform, Bhikhu Parekh argues that Gandhi's fundamental motivation was his desire to rescue Hinduism from the ravages of imperialism and modernity. Parekh explains how Gandhi revitalized (while also often fundamentally and unsettlingly transforming) Hindu concepts and practices that he then pressed into the service of his more comprehensive and secular (and often surprisingly modern) agenda. However, it would be more illuminating to have a historicized account of Gandhi's efforts in this regard, especially as he also competed with other Hindu, Muslim, and secular leaders to redefine India and Indianness. Parekh declares that he wishes

> to explore the manner in which [Gandhi] used...[his] unique moral and political authority...in his battles with his tradition...his critical dialogue with it, his style of reform, his critique of and campaign against unacceptable beliefs and practices, and the manner in which he negotiated his way around and was sometimes defeated by its structural constraints.[24]

However, in his book, Gandhi's Political Philosophy, Parekh does not pay close attention to the bulk of Gandhi's rhetorical efforts toward his radical purposes—the revolutionary transformation of individuals and communities, the forging of radically equitable social and economic relationships, the initiation of a new political system and civic participation via mass participation in satyagraha and the constructive program. As stated earlier in

---

[23] Nanda 9
[24] Parekh 17

this chapter, Parekh devotes himself almost exclusively to a reclamation and re-presentation of Gandhi's ideology and philosophy and their antecedents rather than to a study of the rhetoric and practices of his movement.

Ronald Terchek suggests that Gandhi's project was primarily concerned with reclaiming the autonomy, power, and dignity of the individual from "colonialism, violence, decayed traditions, modernity and modernization, and conventional democratic practices [that] create an incredible range of remainders" and that Gandhi sought "to make the world open to multiple logics and multiple discourses to advance standards that have been discounted or forgotten in the modern project."[25] Terchek does not address, however, in any detail, the precise agenda that Gandhi drew up. As is quite obvious from the archive I have revisited through the Collected Works, Gandhi's movement was more than an intellectual reclamation of ideas and ideals or even a program of psychological encouragement; it was much more an action- and performance-based enterprise seeking to revolutionize bodies, minds, spirits, society, the economy, politics, and religion.

Terchek identifies some of the radical components of Gandhi's project such as its attempt to "disclose the many sites of power in both the public and the private realms," and its efforts to popularize the notion of "power residing not only in the state but also in social practices (such as untouchability), ideology (the authority of modernity), the structure of the economy, and the myriad ways that ideas and people are organized."[26] He sees Gandhi's project as "challeng[ing] an activist state, finding it pretentious in what it thinks it can accomplish and dangerous in the way it uses people to achieve its objectives" and maintains that what Gandhi wanted was "to promote a regime where

---

[25] Gandhi 13
[26] Gandhi 139-40

significant economic, social, and political inequalities have been reduced and where all forms of power are dispersed."[27] While deeply insightful of Gandhi's motives and goals, what is missing in Terchek's critique is a discussion of just how and how well Gandhi did promote this agenda throughout his career. This dissertation is no more than a first step in this vast and complex enterprise as I revisit the discursive archive of the constructive program and identify some of its major themes and initiatives.

Commenting upon Gandhi's "non-political" agenda, Terchek sees Gandhi wanting "to confront not only the state but other locations of power that he finds hierarchical, asymmetrical, and dominating."[28] He observes that "Gandhi invests individuals with extraordinary power...argu[ing] that what individuals accept or tolerate serves to perpetuate institutions and practices that would otherwise languish and disappear."[29] Here, again, the precise what and how of these abstract characterizations of Gandhi's project remain to be explained: what were the "nonpolitical" institutions and practices that Gandhi initiated and manipulated, and how did he activate them? These are considerations I do not take up in this dissertation except in the broadest outline and it would take further research into the specific elements of the constructive program and the trajectories of their prosecution to achieve an insightful understanding of their nature and significance.

Focusing on Gandhi's efforts in connection with the constructive program, Terchek comments upon Gandhi's radical re-conceptualization of political action and civic participation:

---

[27] Gandhi 139-40
[28] Gandhi 142-3
[29] Gandhi 142-3

> Gandhi...offers three new understandings of participation. One involves politicizing ordinary Indians and showing them how politics continually intrudes into their everyday lives. Second, Gandhi believes people act politically when they engage in service, such as working to eliminate untouchability and disease...Gandhi's third form of participation concerns leaders who dedicate their lives to the well-being of their communities and express their politics through service.[30]

The best way to explore the above aspects of Gandhi's project is to attend to the ways in which Gandhi "interrogates various forms of domination" through his satyagraha campaigns and his constructive program as he tries to "deprive them of their self-certainty as well as to enlarge discourse to include previously excluded voices."[31]

Terchek makes a convincing case for shifting the focus of scholarly attention away from Gandhi's ideology and philosophy and onto his rhetorical record and performance:

> Gandhi's focus on real people with real needs in concrete situations means that he seldom wanders into the realm of political perfectionism. Rather, he speaks to how the current institutional arrangements of society and the economy enlarge or diminish the ability of individuals to govern themselves...He wants people to judge the situation in which they live and challenge it when it seeks to deny them their autonomy. And he finds that any local situation is apt to carry the potential for domination and humiliation.[32]

---

[30] Gandhi 162-3
[31] Gandhi 14
[32] "Gandhian Autonomy" 51

The above observation makes a compelling argument in favor of reading the constructive program non-programmatically and in ways that go beyond a summarization of its content, and to engage it instead as a body of discourse that exerted tremendous influence on the politics (rhetoric) of India's independence movement and subsequent nation-building efforts.

Terchek points out an important feature of the constructive program when he observes that Gandhi's "economic texts, as is the case with most of his other writings, are about struggle."[33] He argues that Gandhi "is particularly concerned about the ways in which efforts to dominate continue to appear and reappear in any society [and he] sees people becoming complicit in the way power is employed."[34] Terchek then poses a poignant question that would enrich the deliberations of historians and rhetoricians: "Should we expect Gandhi to offer more than struggle to live an autonomous life?"[35] I would argue that the constructive program should not be apprehended (as it mostly has been) as a blueprint for socioeconomic development or as a systematized exposition of Gandhi's settled ideas on socioeconomic policy but, rather, as a body of contingent utterances in response to rhetorical exigencies and as a result of creative revisionings. The constructive program would be more sensibly approached as a call to Indians to participate in an unending struggle to achieve basic material welfare, but also independence, freedom, self-determination, and dignity through individual and communal efforts in the hundreds of thousands of local communities across the subcontinent—a manifesto rather than a treatise.

---

[33] Gandhi 128
[34] Gandhi 237
[35] Gandhi 237

Finally, Terchek reminds us that

> Gandhi's democracy is not primarily about a set of procedures or institutions but about sites of self-conscious action...he offers not another interest to pluralist politics but a different way of thinking and talking about politics and the state.[36]

The constructive program remains to be studied as just such a "site of self-conscious action" that seeks to replace preoccupation with the "procedures and institutions" of modernity with the task of evolving "a different way of thinking and talking about politics and the state" in an attempt to ameliorate the condition of the growing and worsening "remainders of modern politics."

Joseph Alter argues that research into Gandhi's life and politics has been fundamentally flawed because his "high ideals, and the academic as well as popular attention given to those ideals, have drawn attention away from a more fundamentally important level of action, experience, and social, political, and moral experimentation—his body."[37] Thus, the researcher who seeks a deeper appreciation of Gandhi's work and legacy must attend to the organic linkages that connect Gandhi's philosophical pronouncements with his persuasive discourse and his "experiments" in individual and collective action. This approach is essential to understanding Gandhi's movement and efforts as Gandhi eschewed "any level of analysis [and action] that only rationalized and did not also embody" that particular principle, relationship, or practice.[38]

Commenting on the fortunes of the constructive program during and after Gandhi's lifetime, Alter states

---

[36] Gandhi 160
[37] Alter ix
[38] Alter 27

> [Gandhi] disciplined his own body and vocally advocated the discipline of all bodies, but he did not institutionalize the means by which disciplinary practices could become regimented. Nor did he define the critical links between body discipline and the apparatus of the state. Arguably, one could say that he was extremely successful on a personal and national level, but that on the middle ground of village India his ideal of swarajic self-government was not very successful.[39]

This critique of Gandhi's project in terms of its effectiveness and ineffectiveness at different levels is similar to Judith Brown's verdict about the nature and effectiveness of Gandhi's leadership in the mass satyagraha campaigns of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s.

Gandhi is deemed to have been successful at the national level as he effected horizontal linkages between various all-India constituencies and leaders (however temporary and limited they may have been). He is also acknowledged as having been successful in his personal experiments in embodying a different kind of consciousness, identity, power, leadership, and agency and in ridding himself of several attachments and dependencies in his quest for autonomy and true freedom. He was successful enough to inspire thousands of people to attempt similar experiments within and outside the ashrams he set up). However, his attempts to promote a nationwide movement of revolutionary reform beginning with the individual within the local community—his attempts to link the individual to the nation via a series of spaces, agendas, programs, and practices—are alleged to have failed. While this thesis offers an intuitively plausible evaluation of Gandhi's constructive program, it is not based on a suitably detailed and

[39] Alter 84

historically specific critique of the program and, as such, demands further historical and critical (rhetorical) attention.

It is obvious, from the above discussion, that most of the Gandhi studies that attend to rhetorical aspects of his project still concentrate on Gandhi's ideological formulation and historical practice of satyagraha to the exclusion of, or with minimal attention to, the ostensibly "apolitical" dimension of his project—his constructive program. Even the few scholars who do pay attention to Gandhi's "apolitical" enterprise represent his efforts as a series of "breathers" that were subordinate to and, unfortunately, often interfered with his supposedly "main" political ambition—ending British rule. This observation runs counter to Gandhi's categorical and repeated declarations that his constructive program was, indeed, the primary vehicle to achieve true swaraj in India by regenerating the Indian citizen, revitalizing the local community and, thereby, radically reinventing the nation. In such a project, gaining political sovereignty could be only the first step in a more protracted trajectory of comprehensive and radical reform.

Moreover, the evaluation of Gandhi's constructive program, whenever it is attempted, usually takes the form of an ideational analysis rather than an investigation of its presence and working as a historical discourse. Also, the few studies that recognize the crucial nature of Gandhi's constructive program generally pay very little attention to its rhetoric, concentrating instead on its operational, ideological, and psychological aspects.

Another limitation of existing scholarly investigations into Gandhi's constructive program is the almost exclusive attention to Gandhi's pamphlet, Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place, published in 1941 and revised in 1945. This

pamphlet was written to appease repeated demands by volunteer workers and members of the Indian National Congress (Congress) for a single coherent document outlining the various initiatives subsumed under the rubric of the constructive program. Gandhi continued to maintain, however, that the pamphlet was neither definitive nor exhaustive but merely indicative and heuristic. He wrote the pamphlet in the midst of the unrest that attended India's unwilling induction into World War II, while he toured the country trying to channel that unrest into peaceable and positive action. As such, the pamphlet must be seen as a hastily written and highly compressed compilation—no more than a listing—of the basic elements of the constructive program that he had been promoting over the past four decades.

Despite Gandhi's dismissal of public address and deliberative discourse as significant catalysts in national regeneration, David Lelyveld observes that

> The business of Gandhi, after all, was to mobilize a population to break with established authority, and that, in Bourdieu's terms, was a matter of constructing a new language by means of 'the labour of enunciation,' 'the labour of dramatization.' By performing such labours, Gandhi was harnessing far-flung points of discontent and rebelliousness in a vast land to constitute new categories and social spaces for the exercise of authority.[40]

This is a good characterization not only of satyagraha, the nonviolent confrontation of violence, injustice, coercion, and exploitation, but also of the constructive program, the reformulation of individual identities, social relationships, economic arrangements, and political engagement within local communities.

---

[40] Lelyveld 176

Lelyveld issues a clear call for a rhetorical approach to auditing Gandhi's project and legacy,

> It is remarkable that questions of language—speaking, listening, reading and writing—have hardly ever been taken up in any detail in all the vast literature on Gandhi. For such questions, the problem of what language to use on what occasions, who is authorized to speak, who is in a position to hear, were explicitly matters of long-standing concern in Gandhi's life and thought and have had...a direct relevance to an evaluation of the significance of Gandhi in overturning British rule and in the creation of modern India.[41]

Such an investigation would not only expand and enrich Gandhi scholarship, but also the conversation about various aspects of rhetorical practice, theory, criticism, and pedagogy. In this study I begin such an investigation by revisiting the rhetorical archive of the constructive program. The next section outlines the scope of this first stage of a vast and inexhaustible program of study.

The Scope of this Study

Manfred Steger observes that "the scientifically-based discourse of national health" in colonial India served "as a means of colonial hegemony" and the transparent subjugation and appropriation of Indians and their bodies, but later it "emerged in the hands of Gandhi as a formidable threat to the empire" with his various recommendations for decolonizing the body by modifying diet, dress, medicine, and even sexuality.[42] Thus, Steger illustrates Gandhi's ability to wrest a vital area of hegemonic domination

---

[41] Lelyveld 174-5
[42] Steger 133

away from the imperial power, fundamentally challenge (if not vanquish) it and open up a huge space of discourse and praxis to radical reinvention and popular participation.

Through his constructive program, Gandhi sought to reclaim several other spaces and discourses such as education, sanitation and hygiene, agricultural development, caste and communal relations, and women's rights that had been discursive preserves of the imperial power and its indigenous collaborators. The constructive program should, therefore, be reconsidered as a broad political project in itself that had, as its central purpose, the decolonization and radical transformation of several areas of public and private life and the creation of new discourses and spaces. Such a vast investigation is clearly outside the scope of this study and I attempt mainly the recovery of a historical trajectory of the rhetorical record of the constructive program from the obscurity of Gandhi's vast Collected Works.

Judith Brown emphasizes the opportunistic (although not random) and decidedly pragmatic and rhetorical (as opposed to ideological or systematic) nature of Gandhi's participation in the discourse and politics of the independence movement and the preparations for national reorientation after independence:

> Gandhi's school of politics was rough and ready because there was none to help him, and he was pushed into action by the pressures of the situation in which he found himself. The techniques he evolved were those of the pragmatist; in particular he was limited by the people he had to organize, the audience at which he aimed, and the nature of the issues at stake.[43]

[43] Gandhi's Rise 3

Thus, without a set of a priori political goals and a master plan to accomplish them, Gandhi relied (arguably more strongly than party politicians and modern social reformers) on rhetorical tactics tailored to immediate and specific exigencies.

In the absence of an overarching political game plan and concrete stipulations as to how the game was to be played, Gandhi's project seems to contain many discrete subprojects, discontinuities, and even apparent contradictions as specific issues and opportunities emerged, compelled attention, and were replaced by others throughout his career. It is not surprising, therefore, that many Gandhi scholars exploring his "non-political" actions have focused on specific constituencies (such as untouchables[44], the Congress[45], extremist revolutionaries[46], and peasants[47]); initiatives (such as his Ashrams[48] and Sarvodaya[49]); crises (such as the World Wars and Partition[50]); and tactics (such as Pacifism[51], Embodiment[52], and Clothing[53]).

From the vast literary record he left behind (97 volumes of Collected Works to date), it is clear that Gandhi held that the emergence of a modern postcolonial state, cast essentially in the colonial mould, was as inevitable and imminent as the end of British rule. He was also aware that such a state could be expected to provide only an ameliorated version of "English rule without the Englishman" a prospect he found entirely unsatisfactory. From 1937 (when he resigned from the Congress) onwards,

---

[44] S.R. Bakshi's Gandhi and the Status of Harijans
[45] S.L. Malhotra's Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian National Congress
[46] Nimai Pramanik's Gandhi and the Indian National Revolutionaries
[47] Razi Ahmad's Indian Peasant Movement and Mahatma Gandhi
[48] Mark Thomson's Gandhi and his Ashramas
[49] K.M. Prasad's Sarvodaya of Gandhi
[50] Sandhya Chaudhari's Gandhi and the Partition of India
[51] Catherine Clement's Gandhi: The Power of Pacifism
[52] Joseph Alter's Gandhi's Body
[53] Susan Bean's "The Fabric of Independence"

Gandhi became increasingly anxious to construct a political platform that would be in permanent opposition to modernity (particularly the modern nation-state and the global capitalist economy) and that would radically transform social, economic, and political life in local communities all over the subcontinent. Thus, while demanding formal political sovereignty for India alongside the modern nationalists, Gandhi was also tirelessly engaged in claiming physical and rhetorical spaces from indigenous powers and in prescribing forms of civic action that would engage common Indians. He wanted nothing less than to replace the modernist conceptions of the nation, the state, representative government, civil society, and the individual citizen with less violent, coercive, and exploitative alternatives.

Through satyagraha campaigns and the constructive program, Gandhi defined (and, then, redefined) the goals, agendas, participants, and methods of the Indian nationalist movement. He also managed to get various individuals and associations to attempt radical reforms in social and economic life at the local level all over India. Over its long course, Gandhi's movement (and particularly the constructive program) evolved through the emergence of various initiatives and programs as he tried to mobilize and coordinate various publics, often entailing decisive shifts in purpose, agenda, agents, and agency.

Through the constructive program, Gandhi attempted to create a far-flung, loosely organized, nonviolent, and autonomous body of local leaders who would radically transform social relations, politics, and economic arrangements in local communities throughout India. These leaders would also comprise an informal but permanent political platform of devoted social workers perpetually positioned in opposition to the colonial

state (and, eventually, the postcolonial state) as they sought to reclaim individual autonomy and communitarian self-determination. Gandhi initiated programs of cooperation that aimed to engage people across the myriad and often irreconcilable factions of the Indian population to identify common problems, needs, and aspirations, address inevitable conflicts of interest, and forge a transcendent citizenship that would subsume the narrower identities of religion, caste, and language. Finally, but perhaps primarily and most importantly, he promoted a regimen of personal discipline and responsible action that was expected to reorient the individual away from the dubious inducements of modern culture, global capitalism, and modern materialistic individualism and toward a more spiritualistic consciousness and a communitarian way of life that would be less consumerist and alienating. For Gandhi, such a transformation of millions of Indians would comprise the vital first step in the radical transformation of relationships, structures, and practices that would link individual, community, and nation together in the quest for a truer independence, self-determination, and self-reliance.

And so, in this study, as a first stage of a larger project that inevitably extends far beyond my dissertation, I identify and track the traces of those rhetorical acts whereby Gandhi attempted to forge horizontal and vertical links among various constituencies and publics; to transform the individual into a local and national citizen through direct participation; to generate and popularize the embodiment, ritual performance, and practical enactment of basic principles and values such as localism and nonviolence; to encourage direct political action among the masses (particularly the marginalized) through public service; to challenge various sources and forms of violence, coercion, and exploitation; and to critically examine and reform the individual, interpersonal and social

relationships, and the more distant and formal structures, procedures, policies, and practices of the nation state, political economy, and civil society.

The first necessary step, then, is to restage the constructive program by reclaiming its rhetorical traces from the obscurity of the archive. The main contribution of this dissertation is my identification of the speeches, editorials, published correspondence, and recorded interviews in which Gandhi outlined, explained, or promoted the constructive program throughout his public career. These messages, dispersed throughout his 97 volumes of Collected Works, constitute a vast body of discourse. Like any discourse, the constructive program was composed and disseminated by multiple authors (not only by Gandhi but also by his close aides and many grassroots workers), addressed to multiple audiences (often simultaneously), occasioned by myriad exigencies and insights, and solicitous of various goals and purposes. As I piece together this discourse I have outlined the historical context that informed each of its texts, elucidated the often hybrid authorship of this discourse, suggested why it contained the utterances it did, identified the main audiences it was directed at and the reasons for their selection, and speculated about purposes and aims.

In this study, however, I have paid attention mainly to those messages that can be attributed solely to Gandhi's authorship. The other creative collaborators in Gandhi's movement also deserve inclusion in any comprehensive study of that movement, but such a consideration would need broader archival research and deeper rhetorical-historical analysis that lie far beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Another delimitation of this study is the way I have "read" the discourse I have reconstructed. The archive I attend to is very vast and the historical and rhetorical

dynamics of each of its texts extremely complex. As such, I have limited my attention to the major historical events that acted as exigencies for the more prominent meta-messages whereby Gandhi sought to elucidate and promote the constructive program as a platform of popular action for all Indians everywhere. Moreover, in reading these messages, I have paid attention to their more formal and substantive aspects such as immediate audiences and purposes and general themes and arguments rather than undertake a close reading or stylistic analysis of them.

Obviously, this study offers a very limited representation and critique of Gandhi's constructive program. A more meticulous attention to this body of discourse would entail a closer reading of a larger sample of utterances. However, I retain a deep and abiding interest in Gandhi's movement—particularly, in his constructive program—and have grown more mindful of the remarkable research opportunities that it affords for the rhetorical scholar. This interest will ensure that the various elements and aspects of the constructive program that I have paid only passing attention to or ignored entirely in this study will emerge as topics of future research.

An Outline of the Study

I have followed a rather conventional design in formulating this study, modeling it upon the structure that most rhetorical critiques employ: a consideration of critical purpose and method as I reconsider the constructive program as a long-running and far-ranging body of discourse rather than as a single document, a description of the composite "text" of the constructive program, an analysis of several features of this text, a discussion of the understandings and insights that this analysis has afforded, and the heuristic value these insights might have for historians and rhetoricians.

In Chapter 2, "Reading the Constructive Program," I posit that the proper text of the constructive program (considered as a body of discourse within Gandhi's larger movement) comprises hundreds of speeches, editorials, letters, and interviews, spanning several decades and involving various audiences, exigencies, and purposes. In the next three sections, I acknowledge the hybrid, negotiated authorship of the utterances and argue that a close consideration of audiences and contexts are vital to any attempt to understand how the constructive program evolved as a discursive regime. I then outline the kind of "polysemic" reading of these texts that I undertake in this study and explain my attempts to conduct a broad rhetorical-historical outline of the constructive program.

Chapter 3, "The Constructive Program: A Work-in-Progress," traces the evolution of Gandhi's constructive program as a body of discourse emerging in tandem with his satyagraha campaigns that began in South Africa in the late nineteenth century and ended with his assassination in India in 1948. I divide the long trajectory of Gandhi's career into a series of periods marked by his initiation of mass activist campaigns, stints of imprisonment, excursions into grassroots social service and experiments in rural development, frequent tours of various regions of the subcontinent, and occasional periods of withdrawal (for recuperation and reflection in his ashrams) from formal politics.

In Chapter 4, "The Constructive Program: Its Meaning and Place in Gandhi's Project," I locate the constructive program within Gandhi's larger movement—not apart from and merely incidental to his satyagraha campaigns, but an integral dimension of his two-pronged movement in its own right. I discuss the meaning and significance of the constructive program within Gandhi's larger movement. I explain how the discourse of

the constructive program transformed existing social imaginaries while inventing new ones, expanded the repertoire of rhetorical action in the Indian nationalist movement, challenged the hegemony of the imperial power and modern nationalists simultaneously, set a new agenda for social, economic, and political reform, elicited participation of nationalist leaders and common Indians at various levels of lived experience, constructed publics and counter-publics around various issues and initiatives, and instituted a new paradigm of indigenous leadership and governance.

In Chapter 5, "Experiments in Truth and the Unending Dialogue," I discuss how Gandhi's efforts to promote the constructive program and the various initiatives that he started transformed Indian politics in the first half of the twentieth century by compelling radical reconsiderations of the fundamental elements of political (rhetorical) culture: nation, citizen, leadership, public sphere, and civic action. Gandhi revolutionized the imaginary of the nation by calling upon Indians to unite not on the conventional bases of cultural, political, or economic interests, but around a commitment to the values of truth, nonviolence, and justice. He urged Indians to enact a new empowered citizenship through the renunciation of modern individualism and materialism and improving public life in their local communities through participation in the various elements of the constructive program. Setting himself up as conscience-keeper, Gandhi unrelentingly prodded the westernized elite and members of all the nationalist parties aspiring to leadership to remedy their shortcomings, curtail their ambitions, identify with the dispossessed masses, and work untiringly to improve their lot. He strove, throughout his career, to reorient the consciousness and redirect the energies of Indians so that the local community would become the optimal site where Indians could reclaim their autonomy

and work to enhance their independence, self-determination, and self-reliance. Civic action had to be reconceived by replacing occasional participation in the empty rituals and ceremonies of representative democracy (such as elections) with strategic participation in satyagraha campaigns (nonviolent resistance to injustice and exploitation) and wholehearted immersion in one or more of the initiatives of the constructive program in the local community.

In the concluding chapter, I provide an overview of the contributions, limitations, and heuristic potential of this study. I acknowledge that this study has only attended to the first phase of a proper reclamation of the constructive program as a discourse of deep and lasting influence--the recovery of its utterances from the obscurity of the archive. I then outline some of the contributions this study might make to our understanding of rhetorical concepts such as identity, subjectivity, agency, leadership, and the metamorphosis of social movements and publics. I reiterate the delimitations of this study: the limited selection of rhetorical artifacts in terms of genre and authorship, rudimentary methods of analysis and critical interpretation, inattention to public reception of the constructive program and its continuance as a discursive regime after Gandhi's death. I end the chapter with a discussion of some issues this study has inspired me to consider in the near future—body studies, performance studies, rhetorical style, civic education, subject-formation, agenda-setting, and agency.

CHAPTER TWO

READING THE CONSTRUCTIVE PROGRAM

Gandhi's pamphlet, Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place (1941, revised in 1945), was his last major publication in response to the insistent demands of his supporters for a manual that would encapsulate the principles and prescriptions of his constructive program. The content of Constructive Programme, however, was hardly novel—it was a compilation of issues and initiatives that Gandhi had promoted in one way or another throughout his public career beginning in South Africa in the late nineteenth century.

By 1941, two years into the Second World War, it was clear that, even if Britain survived the war intact, her empire would not. The various Indian nationalists—more prominently, the Indian National Congress (Congress) and the Muslim League—vied for control of the colonial state given the imminent departure of the British. Gandhi, who had resigned from the Congress in 1934, was also anxious to ensure that his project of national regeneration through individual discipline and communitarian service would endure and continue to present moral and pragmatic opposition to the postcolonial state. While Gandhi's constructive program was always an integral part of his movement, it acquired a crucial urgency with the outbreak of the Second World War, and the demands from his followers occasioned a more coherent re-articulation of the free-wheeling and far-ranging initiatives aimed at radical reconstruction.

Gandhi insisted that the constructive program could never be exhaustively articulated as a plan of action to be implemented programmatically within a stipulated

timeframe and across a specific geographical area. He maintained that it would have to rely, instead, solely on the enthusiasm and creative improvisation of dedicated volunteers working separately, in their respective local communities, but in communication with one another. Nevertheless, Gandhi (albeit with many qualifications and caveats) finally did commit his ideas and recommendations to writing in 1941 and then republished the pamphlet, with a few revisions and additions, in 1945.

A few Gandhi scholars have studied Constructive Programme in terms of its ideological and conceptual content, casting it as a "system of thought." In doing so, they have approached it in the traditional form of historical scholarship—"that which transforms documents into monuments."[1] Even Anthony Parel, an astute Gandhi scholar who offers an insightful reading of Gandhi's first major publication, Hind Swaraj (1909)[2], characterized Constructive Programme as a document in which Gandhi's "meaning of independence is further articulated" and whose "main argument was that without a strong civil society independence would benefit mainly the upper castes, and would lack a positive content beneficial to the people as a whole."[3] Parel read Constructive Programme (and, by extension, the constructive program as well) as little more than an epilogue to Hind Swaraj. In this content-based reading, Parel did not do what he did with Hind Swaraj—outline the social, political, and discursive context that informed the production of the pamphlet, suggest why the content of the pamphlet was what it was, identify the main audiences it was directed at, and speculate about Gandhi's

---

[1] The Archaeology of Knowledge 7

[2] Anthony Parel highlights the strategic nature of Hind Swaraj as a polemical manifesto whereby Gandhi sought to gain recognition (even notoriety) in the political arena of early 20th century India, galvanize activists, attract followers, challenge opponents, and initiate dialogue on crucial concepts and concerns related to the nationalist struggle.

[3] "Introduction: Gandhian Freedoms" 5

purposes and aims. Moreover, Parel is not alone in privileging Hind Swaraj as Gandhi's definitive manifesto while downplaying Constructive Programme as an incidental statement of wishful recommendations for a utopian postcolonial India.[4]

In the "Foreword" of Constructive Programme, however, Gandhi cautioned the reader that it "does not pretend to be exhaustive; it is merely illustrative." Moreover, although he acknowledged that his critics would likely "laugh at the proposition," he considered it "still worth the attempt" to suggest ways and means by which India would have to attain independence and self-reliance that went beyond formal political sovereignty. In many ways, Constructive Programme was an important signpost at the crossroads that marked the final phase of Gandhi's career. While he insisted on a clean break with the structures and enterprises of the colonial government, he also maintained that the "men composing the Government [and those soon to compose the postcolonial government] were not to be regarded as enemies" by those seeking a new order and that, while the two must "part ways," they should do so "as friends."

Gandhi also promoted his constructive program as the more valuable dimension (over satyagraha) of his movement. He recommended it as a parallel platform of mass direct action, if not an alternative to modern representative democracy and a globalized capitalistic economy that threatened to perpetuate the marginalization and exploitation of the majority of Indians. He insisted that the constructive program "should prove as absorbing as politics so-called and platform oratory, and certainly more important and useful." Constructive Programme, therefore, was not just as a grab-bag of hastily formulated policies and initiatives for postcolonial India, but a significant historical

[4] Partha Chatterjee, for example, in his book Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World, bases his interpretation of Gandhi's ideology solely on Hind Swaraj.

phenomenon and rhetorical enterprise in its own right—Gandhi's relentless campaign to influence the agenda, policies, and practices of the emerging nation. Thus, far from being a mere repository of utopian prescriptions, Constructive Programme must be seen as a small part of a larger and crucial discourse that spanned five decades and the length and breadth of the Indian subcontinent. Through the discourse of the constructive program, Gandhi tried to engage various constituencies—his followers, critics, opponents, and the Indian people at large—in specific endeavors that would transform individual Indians, their relationships, their community, society, economy, polity, religion, and spirituality.

"Simplifying to the extreme," Lyotard defines the attitude named "postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives."[5] As such, Gandhi may be regarded as a postmodern reformer, rejecting not only the metanarrative of Pax Britannica, but also those of modernity, global capitalism, and various Indian nationalisms. While he challenged these metanarratives fundamentally and comprehensively, Gandhi provided little by way of a coherent metanarrative of his own. Rather, he promoted his movement and, particularly, his constructive program, as a series of "experiments in truth"—a collaborative, self-reflexive platform of direct public action, self-reflexivity, and cooperation that required the participation of the entire citizenry. Such an enterprise allowed no one the upper hand or possession of the "commanding heights" of the nation. The nation, in such a formulation, would have no controlling center, but would emerge in countless scattered sites and evolve into a network of individuals, local communities, and voluntary associations. Therefore, any attempt to study Gandhi's constructive program and appreciate its role and significance in his movement (and in the Indian independence

[5] Lyotard xxiv

struggle) and its legacy must not attend to the pamphlets alone, but also to the whole discursive trajectory that attended Gandhi's movement.

Michel de Certeau points out that "history [involves] a staging of the [past] other in present time [but that] the locus that [history] carves for the past is equally a fashion of making a place for a future."[6] Every Gandhi scholar appears to be driven by such a motivation—to revisit a certain aspect of Gandhi's movement that speaks to present concerns and points to future actions. In my "staging" of Gandhi's constructive program, I set out to explore his agenda of radical (but nonviolent) reform and his experiments with various forms of mass "direct action." The main motivation for the constructive program was Gandhi's dedicated and tireless search for a discipline and praxis (individual and collective) that would foster empowered and responsible citizenship while minimizing the incidence of corruption, violence, and exploitation in public life. Twenty-first century India, with all its technological prowess and economic promise remains a colonial-style state that has effectively marginalized the bulk of its citizenry. Gandhi's call for a platform of mass empowerment and direct popular action outside the realm of the state and the modern political economy has greater resonance today for many more hundreds of millions of people. It is worth revisiting his constructive program for the heuristic (if not inspirational) insights it might afford as one of the most promising (if also most disappointing) efforts to help ordinary people struggling on the margins of society to build an autonomous and dignified life.

[6] de Certeau 85

The Texts of the Constructive Program

While the two versions of Constructive Programme (1941 and 1945) are discrete literary texts, they cannot be read without due consideration to the long process of their inventive evolution and the dense intertextuality that occasioned their articulation in the first place. In re-staging Gandhi's constructive program, the investigator must consider a decades-long trajectory of messages as well as objects, rituals, policies, and practices by which Gandhi tried to create and sustain direct civic participation in local communities throughout the subcontinent. Rhetorical texts are the "traces" of rhetorical actions in history. So, if the function of rhetoric is to create and sustain community and resolve conflicts without recourse to violence, then all the verbal and nonverbal actions whereby Gandhi sought to initiate and promote local involvement in the various initiatives of the constructive program must be regarded as its texts. The creation and sustenance of nonviolent, autonomous, self-determining and self-reliant local communities was the main long-term goal of the constructive program.

Approaching Gandhi's constructive program as a protracted and far-ranging discursive enterprise, not just a couple of pamphlets he put out towards the end of his life, I also wish to keep in mind the redefinitions of the categories of politics, public sphere, private life, religion, nation, citizenship, civic action, etc. that, Gandhi insisted, were crucial to the regeneration of the Indian people. I also see the many utterances and events that comprised Gandhi's constructive program as the rhetorical spaces in which Gandhi tried to renew and reinvigorate his and his supporters' commitment to a program of radical but nonviolent reorientation. In these various efforts, Gandhi also positioned and repositioned himself vis-à-vis the imperial power, the Congress, the Muslim League, the

socialists, and a variety of other constituencies (such as women, students, untouchables, peasants, and urban workers).

Gandhi's rhetoric, in general, has typically been read as a "conversational" transaction in which he laid out prescriptions to his followers and responded to their queries and statements. However, urging the abandonment of the conversational paradigm in studying public discourse, Michael Warner suggests, instead, the adoption of a more complex approach that is sensitive to intertextuality, multivocality, and multi-mediated interactivity.

> In public argument or polemic, the principal act is that of projecting the field of argument itself—its genres, its range of circulation, its stakes, its idiom, its repertoire of agencies. Any position is reflexive, not only asserting itself, but also characterizing its relation to other positions up to limits that compass the imagined scene of circulation. The interactive relation postulated in public discourse...goes far beyond the scale of conversation or discussion, to encompass a multigeneric lifeworld organized not just by a relational axis of utterance and response, but by potentially infinite axes of citation and characterization.[7]

Accordingly, in this study, I consider Gandhi's constructive program as a series of message-texts (ranging across time, space, and media) scattered over the ninety-seven volumes of his Collected Works in which he did much more than lay out an agenda for the new republic and suggest the means for its realization. He wanted to radically reinvent the nation, citizenship, and the public sphere as a site of mass popular participation through direct action (rather than the verbal deliberations of elected

[7] Warner 63

representatives), and effect a reordering of the social relationships, economic enterprises, political alliances, and way of life of the Indian masses.

However, in this study, I have focused only on those "meta-messages" in which Gandhi promoted the constructive program as the more vital and enduring dimension of his movement (as opposed to satyagraha) and tried to get support for it from various parties and publics. I could not, in this dissertation, undertake to examine those messages in which he actually articulated the various principles and provisions, goals and means, rules and regulations, standards and criteria, of the various initiatives of the constructive program. These considerations will form the substance of other, later studies.

Authorship of the Constructive Program

Roland Barthes describes a text as being "not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the message of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash...a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture."[8] This would be a very productive way of looking at Gandhi's constructive program—a discourse in which multiple texts were created, referenced, and paraphrased—many of which were Gandhi's own earlier writings and speeches. Moreover, by Gandhi's admission, even the text of his Constructive Programme was little more than an "outcome of conversations" with voluntary workers who had, later, "felt the want of something from [his] pen."[9]

Many of Gandhi's messages were also "hybrid" in terms of authorship, as B. R. Nanda points out in his discussion of the contributions of Gandhi's personal secretary, Mahadev Desai. Nanda reports that, "ever since he had joined Gandhi [in 1917, Desai]

---

[8] Barthes 146
[9] Constructive Programme 30

had been keeping a day to day diary of...Gandhi's thoughts, conversations, and activities."[10] This diary was a source of many ideas and quotations that Desai used in articles appearing in the newspapers that Gandhi started—Young India, Harijan (Children of God), and Navajivan (New Life). Nanda notes that Desai was the "de facto editor of these journals, even when the Mahatma's name appeared as the editor" and that, although "his articles were scrutinized by Gandhi himself...in course of time, his style came so much to resemble Gandhi's that it became difficult to distinguish the writings of the disciple from that of the master."[11]

Even in Gandhi's oral communications, the patterns and channels of his messages to the mass audiences necessitated the intervention of multiple co-authors, sub-authors, editors, translators, interpreters, commentators, and messengers. As Judith Brown, a definitive Gandhi biographer, notes,

> ...the response of rural people to Gandhi's satyagrahas was often not a response to Gandhi and his plans at all, but to garbled versions of his original retailed to them by local leaders who often had an eye to their own interests as they carried Gandhi's name and tactics to districts where he himself had little hold.[12]

This might have been one of the reasons that Gandhi was reluctant to create or endorse any formal organization under his leadership—the fear of being expropriated and even misappropriated by his underlings, many of whom he never even had occasion to meet.

---

[10] In Search of Gandhi 172-3
[11] In Search of Gandhi 175
[12] "Gandhi and India's Peasants" 11

Bhikhu Parekh, a keen interpreter and critic of Gandhi's project, notes that a diffuse mode of communication was imperative given the nature of Gandhi's movement and programs:

> Since an experiment presupposed a body of rules and procedures, a hypothesis and a theory, which were all precipitates of investigations conducted over a period of time, it presupposed a tradition of inquiry. The tradition began tentatively and was built up by a succession of talented scientists, each building on, criticizing, revising and extending the work of his predecessors.[13]

Thus, the constructive program must be seen as a body of discourse in which Gandhi had, at best, a decisive but partial generative role and one, moreover, in which he actively sought to outline an experimental agenda that was to be independently pursued by a body of "experimenters after truth" according to their own lights.

Susanne Rudolph comments on the pattern of co-authorship and co-leadership that marked Gandhi's mass non-cooperation and civil disobedience movements. She notes that they comprised "a complex structure of leadership and participation extending from the well-known national leadership of the Home Rule League to the less-known Delhi notables, especially of the commercial and professional classes."[14] Moreover, these events received coverage and support from "journalists and editors of various Muslim and Hindu papers as well as Muslim divines who led the Hindu and Muslim artisans in the movement."[15] Thus, Rudolph observes,

> ...co-leaders of substantial national importance...were peers, building on

---

[13] Gandhi's Political Philosophy 97
[14] "Gandhi's Lieutenants" 42
[15] "Gandhi's Lieutenants" 43

> Gandhi's inspiration, innovating within the movement he led and shaped, bringing to it important perspectives and followings...[and Gandhi] amplified himself and his leadership through their diversity.[16]

Gandhi's constructive program, however, fired less enthusiasm among the elites and notables of the subcontinent. It was less sensational and newsworthy and, therefore, unable to gain as much coverage and support in the media and social networks as his satyagraha campaigns did. Thus, closer attention must be paid to the ways in which the constructive program was formulated and propagated in general, with Constructive Programme being only one (and a late and feeble) attempt in this direction.

Foucault refers to the discursive instantiation and multi-dimensional nature of the rhetor when he talks of the "dispersion" of the subject to

> the various statuses, the various sites, the various positions that he can occupy or be given when making a discourse...linked by a system of relations...not established by the synthetic consciousness identical with itself, dumb and anterior to all speech, but by the specificity of a discursive practice.[17]

Gandhi's constructive program must be seen as just such a specific discursive practice and, in this study, I approach it as such rather than as a static text "addressed" by Gandhi to a discrete audience of agents.

Barbara Biesecker suggests the conceptualization of "subjectivity not as an essence but as an effect of the subject's place in an economy of differences...always differing from itself...forever in process, indefinite, controvertible."[18] This is exactly the

---

[16] "Gandhi's Lieutenants" 52
[17] The Archeology 54-5
[18] Biesecker 242

kind of subjectivity Gandhi offered his followers as he encouraged them to "experiment in truth." Such a chronic and reflexive reformulation of subjectivities is at the very basis of Gandhi's constructive program wherein identities, roles, and forms of agency are not established but adopted tentatively and constantly changed as a result of on-going review, critique, and reconstitution.

Accordingly, when studying the constructive program as discourse, "the rhetorical event can not signify the consolidation of already constituted identities [but] makes the articulation of provisional identities and the construction of contingent relations that obtain between them."[19] In this study, then, I set out to explore these identities and relations as they emerge and change in the wide-ranging rhetorical events that constituted Gandhi's constructive program as he addressed several subjects across time and space. And so, it would be necessary to

> ...see the rhetorical situation neither as an event that merely induces audiences to act one way or another nor as an incident that, in representing the interests of a particular collectivity, merely wrestles the probable within the realm of the actualizable. Rather, we would see the rhetorical situation as an event that makes possible the production of identities and social relations.[20]

This is, in the main, what Gandhi was trying to do through his constructive program. He was trying not just to challenge an empire and call an independent and self-reliant nation into being, but to invite every citizen of that nation to experiment in ways of becoming more empowered and engaged—the formation of new agents and the development of new agencies was at the heart of the constructive program. The prosecution of this

---

[19] Biesecker 243
[20] Biesecker 243

project is the focus of my study as I attend to those messages in which Gandhi sought to promote his constructive program by invoking and refashioning identities, practices, and social relations. As stated earlier, I am unable, in this study, to investigate any of the specific elements and initiatives of the constructive program. And so, this study is aimed at being a limited but necessary beginning of an exploration into a very large and complex discourse that demands further, broader, and deeper analysis and critique.

The Audiences of the Constructive Program

In this section, I synthesize the observations of several Gandhi scholars with regard to the constituencies and publics that Gandhi chose to engage (or ignore). Most scholarly attention to the rhetorical efforts that attended Gandhi's movement overlooks the fact that his utterances are rarely abstract, systematic, eternal, and universal, but are mostly occasioned by specific events, relationships, actions, and messages. This inattention to the rhetorical situations in which Gandhi's utterances are invariably embedded has often resulted in grave oversights and misinterpretations of his actions, utterances, motives, purposes, failures, and accomplishments.

Manfred Steger echoes Anthony Parel's observation that, in Hind Swaraj (1909), "Gandhi appealed especially to the professional classes" and it was "only upon his return to India that Gandhi gradually broadened his appeals in an attempt to mobilize the masses."[21] Paul Power also alleges that Gandhi arrived at an "elitist answer to the question of who is authorized to call for disobedience."[22] But this was true only of his mass satyagraha campaigns of non-cooperation and civil disobedience, when he wanted

[21] Steger 113
[22] "Introduction" 7

to be sure of mobilizing a select cadre of competent and responsible workers capable of and committed to nonviolent campaigns of protest and resistance.

In his long public career, however, and particularly in the prosecution of his constructive program, Gandhi initiated mass movements of resistance and programs of social service that mobilized tens of thousands of people from all strata of society throughout the subcontinent. With Constructive Programme, Gandhi again seemed to appeal to a narrow audience: Congressmen, volunteer workers, and the informal leadership of a few constituencies like women, students, untouchables, and urban workers. But this document was produced precisely in response to the petitions from members of these constituencies and it was attended by Gandhi's unconventional and unrelenting efforts to reach other less advantaged constituencies via extensive tours and meetings across the country.

On the other hand, Susanne Rudolph remarks on the "less structured and less sophisticated rural and small town crowds that responded directly to Gandhi's presence, activities and reputation...[who] often required him merely to show himself to those who had come to see."[23] This constituency also was not one of the publics that Gandhi addressed through his constructive program. They were simply part of the "mass contact" phases of Gandhi's movement in which he attempted to rouse the general population to consciousness and enthusiasm for affairs that went beyond the isolated village (usually a specific protest campaign or social service initiative) and to acquaint himself firsthand with social, economic, and political conditions. Rudolph also acknowledges that, "Gandhi communicated...much less abstractly, with the ashramites,

[23] "Gandhi's Lieutenants" 43

men and women, who sought the discipline, order, and authority that a quasi-monastic setting provides" as well as with members of the Congress and voluntary workers (outside the ashrams) scattered in villages all over the subcontinent.[24]

Judith Brown notes the "immense difficulties of communication and appeal in political terms in vast, rural areas where mass media are in their infancy...literacy is minimal [and] there is barely a rudimentary political awareness of the implications of modern styles of politics.[25] Under such conditions, Gandhi had to be "prepared to accommodate his message to local needs, and willing to expose himself to the strengths and weaknesses produced by tenuous alliance with a host of lesser leaders."[26] But this Gandhi was often reluctant to do wholeheartedly in his satyagraha campaigns over which he wanted to exercise strict control to minimize the potential for violence and confusion. Moreover, in promoting the constructive program, wherein a more decentralized strategy was desirable, subordinate layers of leadership and allegiance were very hard to come by. Most volunteers worked alone in villages, often in the face of great logistical odds, the hostility of vested interests and, often, even the indifference of the intended beneficiaries. To create a support system for volunteers, Gandhi felt compelled to start more formal associations such as the Sarva Seva Sangh (Association for the Service of All) in 1923. The critic must, therefore, attend to the ever-changing framework and components of the constructive program to appreciate its role and significance as a decisive political (and rhetorical) force in the nationalist movement.

---

[24] "Gandhi's Lieutenants" 46
[25] "Gandhi and India's Peasants" 13
[26] "Gandhi and India's Peasants" 11

Vivek Pinto offers a concise description of Gandhi's strategy for promoting his constructive program locally and throughout the subcontinent.

> Practical implementation of Gandhi's theoretical principles was accomplished at two levels—micro and macro. On the micro-level, the experiments conducted at the Sevagram ashram were a model capable of being replicated in India's 583,000 villages...On the macro-level, the Gandhi Seva Sangh [Gandhi Service Association] (1923), the Harijan Seva Sangh [Untouchable Service Association] (1933), the All India Village Industries Association (AVIA, 1934), and the Talimi Sangh [Education Association] (1937) were all founded for promoting and implementing the Constructive Programme on a national basis.[27]

Pinto also points out that, early on in Gandhi's career in India, "a devoted band of satyagrahis [nonviolent activists] and lok sevaks [servants of the people], working in close association with Gandhi, selflessly took up these tasks...in many remote corners of the country" and, while many left over the years, some remained loyal supporters throughout Gandhi's life.[28] Therefore, any attempt at exploring the role and significance of the constructive program would also have to attend to these collaborative sub-authors—a consideration that, unfortunately, lies outside the scope of this study although I do attend to Gandhi's attempts to recruit, mobilize, direct, and encourage these sub-authors.

Indira Rothermund argues that "Gandhi's strength...his implicit belief in national unity and his compassionate contact with the masses" also turned out to be a great "weakness" as it resulted in his "overlooking the importance of politicians who posed as

---

[27] Pinto 136-7
[28] Pinto 137

representatives of this or that group."[29] In this way, Gandhi alienated important potential allies who could have supported his constructive program. Moreover, Rothermund notes, Gandhi's "dedicated struggle for independence and social reconstruction, started at the village level, made him extremely indifferent to federal or central constitutions and other legal constructions."[30] This strategy of attending exclusively to activism at the grassroots level precluded the development of a strong physical, symbolic, and institutional infrastructure, aligned to the formal political hierarchy, whereby the constructive program could be compellingly woven into the fabric of the postcolonial state. These wasted opportunities to link his efforts at the local level to the sites and mechanisms of power in the state apparatus and civil society ostensibly limited the reach and weakened the impact of Gandhi's constructive program. Only a closer look at the discursive architecture of the constructive program itself (such as I attempt in this study) could allow for a thorough consideration of this criticism and suggest reasons for Gandhi's choices in this regard.

Rudolph comments on the spontaneous and non-programmatic nature of the constructive program that made it so complex and might have contributed to a sense of incoherence among potential volunteers requiring more specificity in program and method. She also notes its vulnerability to opposition from more cohesive and coherent competitors.

> Unlike a more rigorously ideological leader, who might expect the human material with which he deals to adapt itself rather precisely to his movement's normative and behavioral requirements, Gandhi was strongly attuned to the

[29] Rothermund 88
[30] Rothermund 88

varying inner states and potentialities of his followers. [He was a] movement leader committed to shaping men...[31]

The constructive program does bear out this aspect of Gandhi's leadership—he invited potential volunteers and the masses in general to choose the elements of the constructive program they would participate in and the level of their commitment. This study does set out to identify but not thoroughly explore Gandhi's attempts at creating and transforming identities, developing radical agencies, and promoting social imaginaries that empowered people and motivated them to act.

Gandhi had to deal with three major forces at the sub-continental level throughout his career in India—the imperial power, the Congress, and Muslim separatists.[32] Brown characterizes his role vis-à-vis these three crucial constituencies as "essentially that of a mediator between various groups and forces... mediating between their diverse ideologies and aims."[33] But Gandhi also assumed the role of provocateur and innovator, especially through the "nonpolitical" activities of his constructive program. Through satyagraha and the constructive program, he also succeeded in compelling a transformation of the imperial power, the Congress, and Muslim separatists in terms of their membership, allies, organization, agenda, methods, and goals. In this study, I begin to explore the ways in which the constructive program was aimed not only at engaging the masses in direct action for their empowerment and welfare, but also at compelling the elites occupying positions of power and influence to reconsider their positions of privilege and strategies of dominance.

---

[31] "Gandhi's Lieutenants" 41
[32] Spear 295
[33] "The Mahatma and Modern India" 334

Brown points out the difference in Gandhi's dealings with people at various levels in the socio-economic hierarchy in terms of rhetorical strategy and purpose,

> ...generally speaking to the really poor and illiterate Gandhi's message and appeal was social and religious. To the more prosperous peasants, and the traders and professional men of small towns his appeal became more overtly political: while at the highest levels of political participation he could couch demands in the languages of legislatures and constitutions.[34]

This observation acknowledges Gandhi's ability to address various (and sometimes incompatible) publics simultaneously and highlights the necessity for the critic to be sensitive to shifts in strategy and purpose in his rhetoric and their implications for the nationalist movement and the fortunes of the constructive program in independent India.

The constructive program was a crucial dimension of Gandhi's movement that developed largely in response to shifting exigencies, audiences, and purposes, and it should never be read as a set of prescriptions formulated in the furtherance of ideological goals via programmatic initiatives. Many of the publics Gandhi invoked or mobilized over his career became defunct, inaccessible, irrelevant, or unreceptive and he constantly had to invoke and mobilize new ones. Moreover his observations and recommendations were sometimes criticized as inconsistent, contradictory, hypocritical, or ingenuous, even by his followers. An insightful reading of the constructive program would necessitate close attention to the utterances and dynamics of this complex discourse across its long and far-ranging trajectory.

---

[34] "The Mahatma and Modern India" 337

Texts and Contexts

James Jasinski calls upon the rhetorical critic to cultivate "a broader, organic sense of context" so that the text under study "is positioned as an outgrowth of context."[35] In such a conception, "context does not simply surround or contain the text but permeates or saturates the text as a result of an organic process of emergence and development."[36] Gandhi declared that he wrote Constructive Programme at the behest of his colleagues in 1941 (with a revised edition in 1945), and, therefore, the circumstances and conditions of its production warrant investigation. Moreover, the innumerable utterances that comprise his larger constructive program were similarly rooted in specific exigencies, directed at specific audiences, and aimed at specific purposes, not universal and eternal declarations and exhortations. The constructive program, therefore, merits attention similar to that paid by Anthony Parel in his re-presentation of Gandhi's Hind Swaraj in 1997 (discussed earlier in this chapter).

Jasinski also points to the necessity of "attending to the integrity of the text as a field of action."[37] Accordingly, in Chapter Three, I identify and track the most obvious meta-messages attending the constructive program—messages in which Gandhi promotes the constructive program as the more important dimension of his movement that seeks, above all, to fundamentally redefine concepts such as nationhood, citizenship, democracy, subjectivity, agency, and civic participation. From the discursive trajectory presented in Chapter Three, the constructive program emerges as a vast collage that Gandhi built up piecemeal as he tried to provide, from situation to situation, a

[35] "Instrumentalism" 200
[36] "Instrumentalism" 200
[37] "Instrumentalism" 205

comprehensive framework within which to integrate disparate issues, and to invite the collaboration of various publics.

Jasinski argues that the text "warrants… contextualization because of what it does as a discursive 'event,' not because of what [the author] consciously or intentionally tried to do through his discourse."[38] Accordingly, the various texts of the constructive program would have to be treated as "moment[s] in a dialogue."[39] This study affords only partial attention to this critical requirement as it does not examine the reception of and the responses to Gandhi's messages. Indeed, I attend to only a selective sampling of Gandhi's utterances contained in the Collected Works. Attempting to read these selected texts "within, and against, [an] intertextual matrix," I trace the chronological trajectory wherein these texts emerged, take note of the periodic satyagraha campaigns that took center stage, and outline the larger national, imperial, and global historical events that informed Gandhi's movement.[40]

Reading a rhetorical artifact with attention to context also entails careful attention to features of the text itself that reflect the influence of the rhetorical culture, such as

> Performative traditions [or] specific elements…embodied in a linguistic idiom or language…enacted through particular speaking voices…marked by various figurative and argumentative patterns or structures…perpetuated by a range of textual practices and organized into generic forms that are structured through generic conventions.[41]

---

[38] "Instrumentalism" 206-7
[39] "Instrumentalism" 208
[40] "Instrumentalism" 212
[41] "Instrumentalism" 213-4

In promoting the constructive program, Gandhi addressed specific audiences, some of whom may have been familiar with his discursive style. However, as discussed earlier in this chapter, volunteer workers also formed an important component of the architecture and discourse of the constructive program as they carried and interpreted Gandhi's pronouncements to remote audiences. The critic of the constructive program would have to take into account such argumentative and stylistic shifts as an integral feature of the rhetorical performance of the constructive program, but this complex task lies outside the scope of the present study.

A close reading of the discourse of the constructive program would also require attention to Gandhi's ethos as well as nonverbal and situational factors relating to the various rhetorical performances whereby he promoted it. As Percival Spear, a close associate of Gandhi, observes,

> [Gandhi had] access to deep springs of feeling within the Hindu mind and soul, and [possessed an] aura of sanctity, the Mahatma's mantle which he had woven for himself. The loin cloth had been a first important step, if a scanty one; there followed such things as fasts long and short, the daily spinning, the weekly day of silence, the devotional songs and the prayer meetings. And there were the weekly articles in Young India and the Harijan by which he made himself the general oracle of India.[42]

The above elements of Gandhi's rhetorical repertoire may explain his power as a crowd-puller and the popularity of his satyagraha campaigns. However, when promoting the initiatives of his constructive program, he addressed immediate and mundane concerns,

---

[42] Spear 298

and recommended courses of action and practices that were often perceived as pointless and even undesirable by many (often even intended beneficiaries). I will attend to these elements of the discourse of the constructive program (that set it apart from the more dramatic and sensational discourse of satyagraha) in future studies.

Composite Texts and Multiple Meanings

Leah Ceccarelli states that rhetorical criticism is polysemic when "a critic recognizes 'hermeneutic depth'...[and] does not make a claim about how audiences 'actually' read a text, but instead, offers a new expanded way that audiences should read a text."[43] Such a reading is an invitation to "accept the multiplicity of meanings to fully appreciate the text's deeper significance."[44] In this study, I undertake such a critical enterprise. I argue that scholars of Gandhi and his movement have not paid the constructive program the attention it merits as the long-term, positive, and definitive dimension of his movement and have, instead, paid more attention to his polemical critique of modernity and his periodic satyagraha campaigns—the tactical and negative dimension of his movement. Moreover, the few that have attended to the constructive program have considered only the pamphlets published in 1941 and 1945 and have read them as treatises—repositories of Gandhi's ideology regarding development and progress and a utopian, programmatic agenda for rural reconstruction. In this dissertation, I have set out to recommend attention to the constructive program as a body of discourse in which Gandhi attempted to revolutionize the psychology, social relations, economy, polity, religion, and spirituality of Indians in far more fundamental ways (albeit through regimens of discipline and initiatives of social service at the individual and

[43] Ceccarelli 408
[44] Ceccarelli 408

communitarian level). Accordingly, in this study, I begin a project that extends far beyond this dissertation. I want to "simply show that multiple meanings are supported by the text [of the constructive program], and provide a good reason for audiences to take a pluralist approach that accepts the validity of those meanings."[45]

In this dissertation, I trace a trajectory of selected utterances wherein Gandhi sought to promote the constructive program as the mainstay and more important part of his movement and whereby he sought to radically reconstruct nation, citizen, and democratic civic participation (among other goals). Accordingly, I maintain that Constructive Programme is not to be read as a document in which Gandhi just laid out a "blueprint" or programmatic plan of action for rural reconstruction. Rather, it was Gandhi's ultimate attempt to bolster volunteer workers' commitment to the "nonpolitical" and palpably "unsuccessful" dimension of his project that was in growing danger of being overshadowed by the prospect of political sovereignty. He also tried, through this text, to get the Congress (the heir apparent of the departing British) to sincerely adopt the elements of his constructive program as part of its agenda and modus operandi. Moreover, the pamphlet was also tangentially addressed to Socialists, the Muslim League, and the British, as well as to educated Indians who might yet be noncommittal or hesitant to enter public life within the framework of the various elements of the constructive program. Only a polysemous reading of Constructive Programme could suggest how the pamphlet could serve as a clarion call to these diverse publics.

However, in this study, I argue that a greater understanding of the constructive program and its place in Gandhi's movement is achievable only when the critic goes

[45] Ceccarelli 410

beyond the pamphlet and approaches it as a body of discourse that pervaded Gandhi's entire career. In such a view, Constructive Programme is only a terminal and synoptic document—a hurried compilation of issues and initiatives that any postcolonial state would have to adopt as its primary agenda if it were to become truly independent and self-reliant. Through the larger discursive and performative trajectory of the constructive program that paralleled his long public career, Gandhi set new agendas, initiated grassroots mobilization around several issues, transformed the identities and agencies of several political parties and constituencies, and created a network of volunteers workers who would lead programs of direct popular action (nonviolent activism and social service) in local communities throughout the subcontinent outside the arena of formal politics and without the mediation of representatives and power brokers. Whatever significance the pamphlet may have, therefore, derives only from its status as a single utterance in a much larger and more complex discourse. Accordingly, in this study, I approach the constructive program as a rhetorical-historical phenomenon rather than simply read Constructive Programme as a definitive treatise on development and welfare.

Reading the constructive program as a rhetorical-historical event entails, first and foremost, mapping the trajectory of the constructive program as a body of discourse that spanned the length and breadth of Gandhi's public career. Accordingly, the texts that comprise the traces of the utterances of this long-standing and far-ranging discourse have to be identified. The problematic nature of the authorship of much of the rhetorical archive of the constructive program is another discursive aspect that needs delineation. The multiple audiences that were addressed in a variety of situations and through a variety of media also merit attention in any consideration of intent and purpose, as does

an exploration of the symbiotic relationship between the text and context of these utterances. I have briefly discussed, in the preceding sections of this chapter, how I deal with these issues in this study.

Writing the Rhetorical History of the Constructive Program

Attending to the interplay of rhetoric and history—the ways in which each influences and is influenced by the other—appears to be the key element in David Zarefsky's approach to doing rhetorical history when he states that,

> [in a] study of historical events from a rhetorical perspective...the rhetorical historian [views human conduct] from the perspective of how messages are created and used by people to influence and relate to one another...the historian views history as a series of rhetorical problems, situations that call for public persuasion to advance a cause or overcome an impasse. The focus of the study would be on how, and how well, people invented and deployed messages in response to the situation."[46]

Gandhi's movement—his satyagraha and his constructive program—presents many opportunities for such investigations as he laid great emphasis on persuasion (rather than coercion or violence) as a means of not only confronting oppression and exploitation, but also of resolving interpersonal and social conflicts and overcoming one's own weaknesses and shortcomings. (This is an ironic aspect of Gandhi's movement given his frequent dismissals of "oratory so called" as a worthy and effective mode of political action and a means of effecting radical reform.) Two of his most important manifestos were produced in response to clearly discernible "exigencies"—his pamphlets, Hind

[46] Zarefsky 30

Swaraj (1909) and Constructive Programme (1941, 1945). In Hind Swaraj, Gandhi severely criticized British imperialism and modernity and recommended a novel and dynamic political praxis that would re-form and redirect the elitist and reactionary Indian nationalist movement—satyagraha. In Constructive Programme, he tried to provide a coherent compilation of the wide- and far-ranging concerns and initiatives of the positive dimension of his movement, and addressed the concerns and uncertainties of his followers as he urged them to develop an enduring network of local forums and programs of "direct action" that would bind the diverse peoples of India in a common regenerative and empowering enterprise.

But all of Gandhi's messages cannot be read in this way— much of his project consisted of not just responses to imperial rule and various nationalists, but also creative initiatives challenging the hegemonic dominance of the imperial power and the limited elitist agendas of various nationalists. Zarefsky's recommendations, therefore, cannot provide the sole basis of a method that could do justice to the scope and diversity of Gandhi's movement. What is needed, instead, is an extension of this method to identify and examine the ways in which Gandhi set out to proactively generate and promote his constructive program. Such a method would entail attention to the various exigencies he responded to and the crises he generated, the various audiences and constituencies he addressed and the publics he constructed through his many "unoccasioned" messages. Such a method would also pay attention to his various utterances, actions, and political and ethical choices that marked his articulation and promotion of the constructive program. Approached in this way, a "rhetorical history" of Gandhi's constructive

program would reveal "a perpetual and dynamic process of social construction, maintenance, and change rather than...an isolated, static product."[47]

Apart from a discussion of some ways a rhetorical critic might approach rhetorical texts and contexts more productively and insightfully (outlined in Section 2.4), James Jasinski also suggests a heuristic framework whereby rhetorical texts may be interpreted. He recommends that the critic should pay attention to the "discursive constitution" of the text or the ways in which "textual practices structure or establish conditions of possibility, enabling and constraining subsequent thought and action in ways similar to the operation of rules in a game."[48] Such a critical method fits well with the purpose of my study—to identify and examine the ways in which Gandhi tried to (1) articulate the substance, nature, and methods of his constructive program, (2) recruit a wide array of individuals, publics, and political parties to acknowledge it as the only way for independent India to gain true freedom and self-reliance and to participate in its various initiatives.

Jasinski stipulates "four constitutive dimensions" by which the "discursive constitution" of a text may be analyzed, viz., "self-constitution and the formation of subjectivity or subject positions," organizing and structuring "an individual's or a culture's experience of time and space," establishing "the norms of political culture and the experience of communal existence," and identifying "the stock of fundamental political concepts that shape the culture's understanding of political existence."[49] Through his various messages, Gandhi sought to influence the "self-constitution" of the

[47] Turner 4
[48] "A Constitutive Framework" 75
[49] "A Constitutive Framework" 75

voluntary workers, Congressmen, and various other constituencies such as women, untouchables, students, aboriginal peoples, urban workers, peasants, and vested interests. Attempting to reorganize and restructure time and space, the constructive program (unlike satyagraha) was non-teleological, focused on the present (rather than the past or the future), and privileged the local community as the sphere of public engagement (rather than the national political economy). The norms of political culture that Gandhi sought to promote through the constructive program were those of nonviolence, inclusion (of hitherto marginalized groups, like women and untouchables), participatory (rather than representative) democracy, a minimalist state, and decentralization of resources and policy formation. Among the fundamental political concepts that Gandhi promoted through his constructive program were individual autonomy, citizenship as direct participation in local affairs, a political order that stipulated responsibilities and duties (rather than apportioned rights and privileges), leadership as the assumption of the responsibility for social welfare through social service, and trusteeship (rather than individual or corporate ownership) of wealth.

Jasinski also broadly outlines a methodology for executing a constitutive analysis of rhetorical artifacts that includes intra-textual and extra-textual aspects. Intra-textually, texts may be seen to exhibit "constitutive potential through the invitations inscribed in various discursive forms (tropes, arguments, etc.)"[50] The various texts of the constructive program extend many such "invitations" to many constituencies and I attend to these features of the texts I have selected for analysis in Chapter Three. Extra-textually (or "extensionally," as Jasinski puts it), "texts exhibit constitutive force through the cultural

[50] "A Constitutive Framework" 74

circulation and discursive articulation of their textual forms in ways that enable and constrain subsequent practice."[51] This aspect of Jasinski's analysis is outside the scope of my study but I would definitely take it up in future studies of specific initiatives or phases of the constructive program. Jasinski notes that, "texts invite their audience to experience the world in certain ways via concrete textual forms; audiences, in turn, appropriate, articulate, circulate, and/or subvert these textual forms in ways that release and transform their potential constitutive energy."[52] A comprehensive exploration of Gandhi's constructive program would entail attention to both aspects of rhetorical action—textual manifestation and textual reception—but my current study is limited to the first aspect and, even then, only to those "meta" utterances whereby Gandhi tried to articulate and promote the constructive program as a crucial enterprise that could form the basis for genuine and permanent national reconstruction and regeneration.

Looking for patterns and themes in the complex discourse of the constructive program, I discern "illocutionary functions (speech acts such as assertions, commands, and requests) and other pragmatic properties (strategies of politeness)" that Gandhi employed while addressing different constituencies or in different situations.[53] To make connections and divisions across the different modes of discourse, I also attend to intertextual references discernible in various utterances. Finally, I also identify various "social strategies (attack, marginalization, problematization, or inferiorization)" that characterize many of Gandhi's verbal and nonverbal attempts to consolidate

[51] "A Constitutive Framework" 74
[52] "A Constitutive Framework" 74-75
[53] van Dijk 28

constituencies, draw lines of distinction and inclusion around issues and groups, and encourage participation in his constructive program.[54]

Promoting the constructive program throughout his political career, Gandhi embarked upon many related projects and initiatives and, consequently, his followers and collaborators came to assume different identities and roles as they participated in them. A particularly significant and overarching aspect of Gandhi's rhetoric across time, space, and situation, is his use of the metaphor of experimentation. He stressed the tentative and ever-evolving character of every policy or plan of action he proposed. His movement did not just seek to resist domination and oppression (through satyagraha), it also sought to transform existing identities, relationships, and practices (via the initiatives of the constructive program) so that Indians and their nation could be truly regenerated. Such a comprehensive agenda could not be articulated in terms of discrete goals and clear plans of action, nor could any single person or group claim exclusive authorship of such a movement or obedience from unquestioning followers. Opportunism (the identification and creative exploitation of opportunities for strategic intervention) and improvisation (constant reflexivity, dialogue, and modification of tactics by and among volunteers) would have to be the key elements of such a project. Thus, attention to Gandhi's use of the metaphor of experimentation plays a key role in my attempts to discern an overarching coherence and continuity in the many contingent, shifting, and open texts and performances of the constructive program.

Several other features of the constructive program also merit exploration as elements that do significant rhetorical work. The verbal messages often contain

[54] van Dijk 30

strategic pronoun shifts that serve as devices for identity management (both for Gandhi and his readers/listeners), invitations to identification for some constituencies, occasions for division and juxtaposition for others, and the creation of publics based on adherence or opposition to certain beliefs, values, attitudes, interests, and roles.

The ultimate rendering of Gandhi's nebulous constructive program into written form was also occasioned by (and may have generated expectations in) readers and Gandhi seems to have addressed these expectations sometimes directly (for example, when he qualifies what Constructive Programme does and does not do) and sometimes implicitly (as he fulfills certain expectations and violates others in his various other messages and actions). Gandhi explicitly states some of his purposes for compiling the elements of the constructive program in the form of a pamphlet, but other purposes are discernible in his selection and treatment of topics, his construction of various other texts, and his choices of language-in-use. Thus, attention to topics and themes, structure, language, semantics, and "many properties of the expression level of discourse may be interpreted as signals of underlying meaning, perspective, interaction strategies, persuasion tactics, and opinions or attitudes" that Gandhi wanted to promote, preclude, or problematize.

A Scaffolding for Staging the Constructive Program

What is particularly interesting to me as I revisit Gandhi's movement, especially the constructive program, is its strong postmodern flavor (as defined by Lyotard). Independent India retains a very likely resemblance of the colonial state constituted under British rule. Retracing Gandhi's nonviolent struggle against the imperial power and various nationalists might afford some insight into the role and influence of his

movement that sought to transform identities, relationships and practices, and not just material conditions or constitutional provisions. A rhetorical-historical examination of Gandhi's movement might also prove insightful as to how his struggle to improve the quality of life and the dignity and autonomy of the common people may be reclaimed and extended at the present moment.

The first necessary step towards such a re-visitation, as suggested by de Certeau, would be to "stage" Gandhi's project as the past other. In this study, therefore, I attempt to make visible the traces and trajectory of that part of Gandhi's project that offers the most likely source of inspiration for the revitalization of civic participation—the constructive program. Following the trail across ninety-seven volumes of Gandhi's rhetorical archive, I have attended to those utterances in which Gandhi identifies the crucial concerns that Indians must address if they are to achieve true freedom (agenda setting), invites a transformation of self and community that is liberating and empowering (subject formation), and suggests ways of being/belonging/abandoning and having/holding/ renouncing that mitigate poverty, injustice, and alienation (agency).

As I attempt to stage Gandhi's constructive program, I extend Zarefsky's prescriptions for a productive rhetorical-historical method. Looking at the exigencies that Gandhi responded to throughout his public career and that shaped his movement (satyagraha and the constructive program), I have also attended to the opportunistic crises he often generated to compel attention to elements of a radical agenda, to call into being empowered agents with missionary zeal, and to jumpstart revolutionary initiatives and practices that promised to translate hopes and dreams into social, economic, and political reality.

Heeding Ceccarelli's suggestions, I acknowledge that this restaging of even a portion of the constructive program is bound to warrant multiple inspirations and motivations as diverse peoples (now as then) identify variously with its texts, authors, and invitations. In this study, I pay attention to the ways in which the constructive program may be read as a far-ranging discourse that engaged myriad audiences over a plethora of radical issues, invited agents to redefine themselves, enabled the formation of unprecedented publics, and initiated programs and practices aimed at transforming the lives of millions.

Finally, in this study, I have followed some of advice that Jasinski offers rhetorical critics. I pay attention to the ways in which the various texts of the constructive program and their contexts may be apprehended. I also attend to the "discursive constitution" effected by these various texts—the ways in which they invited "the formation of subject positions," challenged "the norms of political culture," and colored "the stock of fundamental political concepts." I have not paid enough attention, in this study, to the internal dimensions and dynamics of the constructive program such as its "illocutionary functions" and its "social strategies," but they remain two of many concerns that are bound to inform and shape my future research into the ways in which Gandhi's rhetoric and performance exerted a compelling influence in twentieth century India and the promises they continue to hold out even today.

I hope, however, that this study will serve to arouse and sustain interest in closer investigation of the discursive record that survives Gandhi's movement. Part of the heuristic value of this remarkable archive derives from the opportunities it affords the rhetorical scholar to study the ways in which disenfranchised, impoverished, and

marginalized people might generate the power to reclaim their dignity, autonomy, and self-determination nonviolently and, at least partly, through rhetorical action.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CONSTRUCTIVE PROGRAM: A WORK-IN-PROGRESS

Early on in his public career, Gandhi sought to enfranchise Indian subjects of the British Empire and secure their civil rights—first in South Africa and then in India. However, he realized very early that, while resisting the exploitation of the colonial state and its indigenous collaborators, Indians also had a long way to go before they could be empowered citizens. In the first place, a sense of a shared "Indianness" was nearly absent among most of the peoples of the subcontinent. In addition, the horrific poverty caused by British policies and practices rendered the lives of the majority of Indians a brutish struggle for survival. Moreover, several widespread social evils, such as untouchability, misogyny, and sectarian bigotry had little or nothing to do with British rule. And so, Indians had a great deal to do by way of "putting their house in order" even as they struggled for greater autonomy, self-determination, and self-reliance.

Throughout his public career, Gandhi emphasized the need to attend to India's "internal evils" even as he acknowledged the need to resist and, ultimately, throw off the "external evils" of British rule and modernization. While the latter aspect of his project received much enthusiastic support from Indian nationalists and other publics, the former was embraced less enthusiastically and by fewer people. In fact, many, even among his supporters and followers, thought his attention to "social work" was less important (if not altogether a waste of effort) than his periodic forays into formal politics.

And yet, Gandhi kept on promoting a varied and growing agenda for economic, social, and even psychological and physiological reform throughout his long public

career. This set of concerns, that he later called his constructive program, remained an obsessive preoccupation throughout his career as he strove to get his followers and modern nationalists alike to adopt them, greatly expanding the hitherto limited agenda of gaining greater participation in the colonial administration. In this chapter, I follow Gandhi's rhetorical efforts to promote his constructive program even as he joined and shaped the civil rights movement in South Africa and, later, the nationalist movement in India.

The Coolie Barrister: Building Loyal Subjects of the One Empire

The earliest record of Gandhi's public address—to public figures and institutions and with sections of the (mainly Indian) public—runs from 1884 to June 1896 and is mainly comprised of petitions and memorials that Gandhi drafted on behalf of the Indian community in South Africa that suffered many disabilities and discriminatory policies and practices at the hands of the various governments in South Africa (not then a unified country). Gandhi was a barrister with a private practice and these petitions and memorials were generally signed by other prominent figures in the Indian community rather than by Gandhi who was acting only as legal counsel. However, clearly evident in these early communications with public authorities and institutions is Gandhi's "method of publishing facts and appealing to reason and conscience through arguments" that remained a hallmark of his rhetorical strategy throughout his later public career in South Africa and India.

Gandhi began to get increasingly involved in the public relations efforts of the Indian community in South Africa on a personal rather than professional level and, inevitably, clashed openly with the South African governments. He visited India in 1896

as a representative of the Indian expatriate community to raise awareness of the problems they were facing in South Africa. Traveling widely, and meeting many influential Indians, Gandhi also addressed public meetings and published pamphlets.

Continued and increasing involvement in the Indian expatriate community's struggle for greater civic and political rights led Gandhi into roles and activities that went far beyond his commitments as private legal counsel. He was instrumental in expanding and strengthening the Indian Natal Congress (in South Africa). He organized an Indian Ambulance Corps during the Boer War of 1899, attempting to mobilize the Indian community within the framework of a coherent public enterprise as well as seeking to impress upon white South Africans the credentials of the Indian community as a loyal and worthy partner in South Africa that deserved better treatment and even limited inclusion in the politics and government of the colony.

Gandhi visited India again in 1901 and, in a speech on December 27 at the 17th Session of the Indian National Congress (Congress) at Calcutta, he urged the delegates to fulfill its historic mission—"to testify to [India's] ability to stand side by side with the other civilized races of the world in foreign enterprises and self-government."[1] In a speech at a public meeting on January 19, 1902, he blamed "Indians themselves...for the feeling of hatred raised in the Colonials against them" and declared that "better-class Indians who could be the peers of the Colonials in every phase of life" would not have provoked "so much bad blood."[2] He also advised Indians that if they "claimed the rights of British subjects, they must recognize the responsibilities also of that position."[3]

---

[1] CW 3:215
[2] CW 3:217
[3] CW 3:217

On his return to South Africa, Gandhi started a "viewspaper," Indian Opinion. Up until this time, Gandhi's followers were chiefly Indian Muslims who were prosperous merchants and retailers.[4] Later on, he deliberately appealed to large numbers of low-caste Hindu miners and plantation workers who had been brought as indentured laborers to Natal.[5] Thus, early on in his public career, Gandhi grew accustomed to working with Muslims and Hindus simultaneously and successfully. On his return to India, a little more than a decade later, he attempted to forge similar Hindu-Muslim and upper-and-lower caste cooperation—a hugely problematic enterprise on the Indian subcontinent.

On June 4, 1903, in the inaugural editorial of Indian Opinion, he declared that his intent was to dispel "the prejudice in the minds of the Colonists, arising out of misunderstanding the actual status of the Indian as a British subject."[6] He also intended to "unhesitatingly point [out the faults of Indians] and suggest means for [their] removal" thus promoting "harmony and good-will between the different sections of the one mighty Empire."[7] In another editorial, about a month later, he urged Indians to avail themselves of the "unique opportunity of learning from...Englishmen [who] would evolve order out of chaos, and would make a garden in a wilderness" and to emulate their "spirit of unity, co-operation, and...sacrifice for the sake of the general good."[8]

Gandhi continued to live in Johannesburg, pursuing his career and remaining active in the public representation of the Indian community. In an editorial on January 21, 1904, he urged more Indians to begin to work "for the community" and keep as

---

[4]Brown, Gandhi's Rise 4
[5] Brown, Gandhi's Rise 10
[6] CW 3:313
[7] CW 3:313
[8] CW 3:355

remuneration "only a proportion of what is secured" through their efforts.[9] He reminded Indians that they would have to subject themselves to "self-sacrifice...before they may expect relief," which meant that every Indian would have to "put his hands into his pocket for the common good, give his time and energy," sink "[i]ndividual differences...in the face of common danger" and renounce "[p]ersonal ease and personal gain," cultivate "patience and self-control...because the opposition set up against [them was] overwhelming."[10]

In an editorial on August 13, 1904, he urged the Indian community to "carry on a battle against the curse" of drunkenness, prevalent even among Indian women—an enterprise in which "all creeds might usefully join hands."[11] In an editorial on March 11, 1905, he admonished Indians for being "unmindful of the maxims of good health" and for not going to "parties, balls, plays" like the Europeans, as a result of which their lives were "dull and monotonous"—a problem that required a "countrywide effort...to save Indian youth from being blighted prematurely."[12]

By 1905, as his commitment to public service grew, Gandhi's personal life was transformed and he emphasized the need for public servants to commit themselves to a life of "simplicity and manual labor."[13] He became convinced that public workers should observe brahmacharya (celibacy) to ensure genuine and absolute commitment to public service without personal or domestic distractions, and took the vow himself at age thirty-seven. He established the "Phoenix" settlement, an ashram, in South Africa and

---

[9] CW 4:112-3
[10] CW 4:113
[11] CW 4:236
[12] CW 4:373
[13] CW Prefaces: 17

patterned it after a Trappist monastery he was much impressed with. In an editorial on October 14, he urged educated Indians to embrace the "unique privilege" of becoming "a missionary in hygiene and sanitation"—a pressing need among the poorly housed indentured laborers in South Africa and a target for European taunts that lack of sanitation among Indians was evidence that they were unfit to be admitted to full citizenship.[14]

In a speech to the Natal Indian Congress in Durban on April 24, 1906, Gandhi once again urged the Indian community to raise an ambulance corps to help the Natal Government during the Zulu rebellion that had just broken out. He argued that, "if they claimed rights of citizenship, they were bound to take their natural share in the responsibilities that such rights carried with them."[15] In another editorial, a couple of months later, he explained that such an enterprise would be "likely to bring in some political advantage"[16] while improving the "condition of those who join" as they would "gain in strength and energy and...be deemed to have done their duty as citizens."[17]

On receiving a poor response, he scolded the Indian community, "do not be indifferent, keep your houses dirty, lie hugging your hoarded wealth...[and] live a wretched life."[18] He reminded them, in another editorial, that their "salvation" would "ultimately have to come from within, and that will only be done when the rising generation of Indians recognise their communal duty and are prepared to undergo trials

[14] CW 5:101
[15] CW 5:291
[16] CW 5:362
[17] CW 5:362
[18] CW 5:366

and difficulties."[19] Indians would not be able to improve their standing in the British Empire only by "addressing petitions," he admonished, but would also have to "sacrifice...bodily comforts...for the sake of others."[20] And so, from very early on in his public career, Gandhi urged Indians to recognize that their demand for equality with whites in civic affairs and before the law would have to be earned not only by demanding the removal of discriminatory policies and legislation, but also by greater participation in civic life, philanthropy, and the abandonment of traditional prejudices and stereotypes that came in the ways of their relations with Indians of all religions, ethnicities, languages, and social status.

In 1906, the South African Indian community sent Gandhi to London to put forward their pleas and demands for expanded civic and political rights and the removal of economic and social discrimination before the Imperial Government. In his appeals, Gandhi tried to demarcate common ground on which the Imperial Government and all its subjects could meet and negotiate to arrive at mutually advantageous arrangements—a strategy that made him indispensable throughout his later political career in India when he often served as mediator between British and Indians, and also between various nationalist parties and factions.

Gandhi failed, however, to make any headway in the negotiations with the Imperial Government, and declared in an editorial that he did not have "much faith in articles and speeches...[as] they call[ed] for no courage" and that "Deeds after all are better than words."[21] This disenchantment with the formal constitutional process of

---

[19] CW 5:405
[20] CW 5:414
[21] CW 6:30

bargaining with the Imperial Government for concessions grew over the years and strengthened Gandhi's emphasis on "direct action" on the part of the masses as the best method to resist injustice and exploitation and claim autonomy and self-determination. In an editorial on January 5, 1907, he insisted that "Under British rule, justice is often not to be had without some show of strength, whether of the pen, of the sword, or of money" and called on the Indian community to take decisive action in tangible and immediate ways to strengthen their own position within the Empire rather than petition for favors.[22]

Back in South Africa, in a June 1 editorial, he insisted that "the moral energy needed to achieve...a united and independent India...[was] wanting...[and the] task of promoting" this goal belonged to "the servants of India"...the trustees of the Indian people...[who] should give up the desire for wealth, status and physical comforts, and dedicate their lives to India."[23] These trustees would have to "know the history of India...[and] understand what India needs now."[24] They would also "need to observe total celibacy" and not be "burdened with the responsibilities of a family."[25] In an editorial on June 8, Gandhi urged Indians to take responsibility for furthering their own welfare by taking up "so many things which can be done through sheer self-help and without Government aid," such as building up an alternative educational system that was more in keeping with Indian conditions and requirements.[26]

The Transvaal Asiatic Registration Act that came into force on July 1, 1907 required all Indians to register themselves at their own cost and report any changes in

---

[22] CW 6:269
[23] CW 7:14
[24] CW 7:14
[25] CW 7:14
[26] CW 7:29

domicile or movement within the colony. Gandhi initiated his first satyagraha campaign to prevent the implementation of this Act when numerous petitions failed to move the Transvaal Government to repeal it.

In an editorial on August 24, he stated that it was "the duty of every Indian to read every line" of Indian Opinion which was "afterwards to be acted upon."[27] He also recommended that "certain articles and translations should be read and re-read...[and] discussed in every home in India."[28] This was necessary, he stated, in an editorial on November 23, because Indians in South Africa were "surrounded by an armed camp...[and] if they remain[ed] idle and [did] not look after the interests of [their] community...[they would] very likely be reduced to a miserable plight in future."[29] Later on, he reminded Indians in South Africa that they were a "handful of men, usually accounted as not particularly brave...crossing swords with a comparatively mighty Government with unrestricted power" and had, therefore, to be "willing and ready to sacrifice commensurately with the result to be obtained."[30]

Insisting that the Indian community volunteer its services again during the Second Zulu War, Gandhi simultaneously launched his first satyagraha campaign against the Transvaal Government in early 1908, urging Indians to disregard the new registration requirements. In an editorial on February 8, he declared that this campaign had only "prepared the ground" and that Indians now had to decide "what kind of a building...[to]

---

[27] CW 7:186-7
[28] CW 7:186-7
[29] CW 7:380
[30] CW 7:399

construct and how."[31] Thus, this campaign, while directed against the Natal Government, also required Indians to engage in much soul-searching. Thus, the constructive program of self-regeneration (although Gandhi did not call it so at this time) was the flip side of any kind of activism directed against external oppressors.

Insisting that Indians should "never submit to any arbitrary action,"[32] Gandhi declared that "satyagraha...ought to be practised not only against a Government but against society as well."[33] That is, it had to be turned inward as well as outward in the struggle for justice and a better life. Indians, Gandhi declared, were reluctant to examine themselves honestly and he scolded them for living "as a poor and cowardly race, not only in your relations with the Government but in your personal relations as well...either because of fear, laziness or undue regard for others."[34] He insisted that such an attitude did "no good to India's cause, notwithstanding the number of external remedies... notwithstanding the Congress sessions, not even by...becoming extremists."[35]

In an editorial on July 18, Gandhi insisted that, "what people...all over the world...call[ed] swarajya [independence] [was] not enough for the nation's prosperity and happiness."[36] He declared "British rule in India is an evil and you need not believe that any very great advantage would accrue to you if the British were to leave India... the reason why they rule over you is to be found in yourselves...your disunity, your immorality and your ignorance."[37] In an August 22, editorial, he stated "the lesson that I

---

[31] CW 8:56
[32] CW 8:91
[33] CW 8:91
[34] CW 8:92
[35] CW 8:173
[36] CW 8:373
[37] CW 8:373

would have my countrymen to learn from this struggle is...that unenfranchised... unrepresented though you are in the Transvaal, it is open to you to clothe yourselves with an undying franchise" by resisting anything "in conflict with your ideas of right and wrong...with your conscience...with your religion."[38] He also held the Natal Government culpable for not fulfilling its "duty of a trustee...to make [its] ward fit for...full citizenship."[39]

The satyagraha campaign intensified into 1909 and, in a January 23 editorial, Gandhi addressed Indians in South Africa:

> ...get training in organizing a movement, learn to be resourceful and demonstrate that you are not cowards but men...a nation...cease being the goats...and be lions...to show to the world that you are one people...the children of India ready to lay down your lives for her.[40]

In a February 20 editorial, he advised that, "no one is to wait for a lead from others [or] to point to others in justification of one's own lapses."[41] He urged Indians to take note of "the winds of self-respect and patriotism...blowing on every side" and warned them that they would "sink into utter insignificance or be squeezed out of existence like fleas if, at this time when the nations of the world [were] competing with one another, they [did] not wake up and assert themselves."[42]

On June 5, Gandhi called for more volunteers to join the satyagraha campaign against the Transvaal Government, warning them that they would have to be willing and

---

[38] CW 8:459
[39] CW 8:475-6
[40] CW 9:159
[41] CW 9:195
[42] CW 9:197

prepared to go to jail. Such a course of action would necessitate their cultivation of "six forms of wealth" in their personal lives, viz., " Freedom from addiction to harmful things...A well-disciplined body...Disregard for comfortable seat or bed...Extreme simplicity in food habits...Total freedom from false sense of prestige or status...[and] Fortitude."[43] Henceforward, he demanded that these stipulations be adopted as criteria of eligibility for all those involved in public service.

In the second half of 1909, Gandhi again traveled to London to persuade the Imperial Government to intervene in the Transvaal impasse but returned, frustrated in his mission, after four months. On his return voyage to South Africa he wrote his famous manifesto—Hind Swaraj—in which he castigated not only the hypocrisy and inherent injustice of the British Imperial system, but rejected modern civilization in general as well as its by-products such as industrialization, militarization, and global capitalism. He urged Indian nationalists of all persuasions to reformulate the concepts of freedom, independence, and development. He opened another ashram called "Tolstoy Farm" to provide shelter to the families of those arrested during the Transvaal campaign. In it, he began his first experiment in communal living based on manual labor and a regimen of physical and psychological discipline whereby he aimed to create exemplary volunteer workers who would take on leadership roles in their communities once they left.

In an editorial on April 23, 1910, Gandhi exhorted Indians in South Africa to "take a lesson from their present condition...[and] realize that it would not do for them, on returning to India, to treat the [untouchables] with contempt."[44] The campaign against

[43] CW 9:236
[44] CW 10:228

untouchability was to become one of the most important elements of his constructive programme on his return to India. In a June 18 editorial, Gandhi urged the Indian community to "realize that satyagrahis are its true servants and precious jewels, and so to look after them and encourage them."[45] He reminded would-be satyagrahis that, "public honour and parties should have little attraction" for them and they should consider it their "duty...merely to do and to suffer."[46]

Throughout 1911, Gandhi continued to negotiate with the Government of the newly formed Union of South Africa for the removal of various disabilities that Indians continued to endure in the new republic, most notably the non-recognition of Indian marriages conducted according to customary rites. Taking stock of his two-year-old satyagraha campaign that had produced no tangible changes in government attitude and policy, Gandhi listed its intangible benefits in an editorial on June 3, 1911:

> public opinion has been roused all over India...the entire world has learnt of our struggle and...admired the Indians' courage...the enactment of further thoughtless legislation in the Transvaal has been prevented...we have won the sympathy of many whites...the prestige of the Indian community has risen...the Government realizes that we are invincible...and the Indian community, once timorous, has now become brave.[47]

Gandhi maintained that what this experiment in satyagraha had demonstrated was that Indians needed "neither big associations with their ostentatious ways of doing things, nor societies nor meetings" and that they should not "keep looking at one another, waiting to

[45] CW 10:275
[46] CW 10:275
[47] CW 11:99-102

act till others give the lead."[48] The only thing needed for Indians to get true freedom and independence, Gandhi insisted was to "persevere in [their duty] till the moment of death."[49] In an editorial on January 18, 1913, Gandhi drew attention to the pitiful state of most Indians in South Africa and declared that all Indian parents were duty-bound to "prepare one of their boys for public work—that is, work in the service of the community."[50]

Through 1913 and 1914, Gandhi was engaged in a "final satyagraha struggle" to get the South African Government to pass the Indians' Relief Bill. In an editorial on September 20, 1913, he outlined a list of tasks for those not involved in active satyagraha and suggested that they could:

> look after the business of those who go to gaol and care for their families or see to the maintenance of their dependants...send contributions to the satyagraha fund...[hold] province meetings and [pass] resolutions...[send] "telegrams and letters...to the Government...[acquaint themselves] with the aims of the campaign and the nature of the issues involved...[send] issues of Indian Opinion pertaining to the struggle...to different places in India and England...[and] set apart some time for some work or other connected with the satyagraha.[51]

In a December 24 editorial, he urged the general public to demonstrate greater symbolic and spiritual solidarity with the satyagrahis and their "helpless widows and orphans by

[48] CW 11:127
[49] CW 11:127
[50] CW 11:441
[51] CW 12:197

themselves observing mourning" and making small sacrifices of creature comforts in their daily lives."[52]

Home Again: Fighting for Freedom with a New Weapon

Gandhi returned to India for good in 1914, wanting to participate in the more challenging nationalist movement in his home country. From 1914 to 1917, while the First World War was raging abroad, Gandhi followed his mentor's (Gopal Krishna Gokhale) advice "that he should plunge into no hurried program of action but should study Indian conditions for a year before he got involved in any public issue."[53] He spent three years traveling across the subcontinent and acquainting himself first-hand with common Indians of whom he knew so little. He established his first Indian ashram in May 1915 that was to be, like the Phoenix Settlement in South Africa, a training center in which volunteer workers could experiment with Gandhi's new method of satyagraha as well as many items of constructive work. During this period, he also conducted his first (and successful) satyagraha campaign in India to ameliorate the slave-like working conditions of indigo cultivators in Bihar. This campaign also ensured that Gandhi, hitherto little-known in the Indian political scene, suddenly became a prominent figure and began to attract media attention that continued to grow.

Speaking at the Social Service League, in Madras, on April 25, 1915, Gandhi promoted a familiar theme—the paramount need for dedicated and selfless volunteers to make the nonviolent struggle for true freedom and independence a reality. He declared, "for social service what was required was not money but men, men of the right sort with

[52] CW 12:282
[53] CW Prefaces: 54

right sentiments, with an abiding love and charity and full of faith in their work."[54] In a Draft Constitution for his new ashram, published on November 7, 1915, he stated that the "object of the Ashram is to learn how to serve the motherland one's whole life."[55]

In a speech at the Benares Hindu University on February 6, 1916, Gandhi stressed the need for direct civic action on the part of the masses to make the nonviolent struggle for true freedom a success declaring "No amount of speeches will ever make us fit for self-government...it is only our conduct that will fit us for it."[56] Referring to the widespread lack of sanitation in Benares (a major site of pilgrimage for Hindus) Gandhi asked, "If even our temples are not models of roominess and cleanliness, what can our self-government be?"[57] He held Indians responsible for much of the corruption and misrule that the British Government got away with because of the poor sort of citizens that Indians were:

> many members of the Indian Civil Service [mainly British]...were gentlemen before they came here, and if they have lost some of the moral fibre, it is a reflection upon ourselves...The atmosphere of sycophancy and falsity that surrounds them on their coming to India demoralises them as it would many of us.[58]

British rule was possible only to the extent that it could forge a symbiotic relationship with indigenous powerbrokers, chieftains, warlords, and a large army of underlings—clerks, constables, soldiers, and so on. And so, getting rid of British rule would

---

[54] CW 13:61
[55] CW 13:91
[56] CW 13:212
[57] CW 13:213
[58] CW 13:216

necessitate a prior restructuring of local, communal, and regional political economies. Thus, the first step in holding the British Government accountable or bringing about its demise, was the reform and sacrifices Indians themselves would have to undergo to become autonomous and empowered citizens.

Speaking to Europeans and Indian Christians at a Missionary Conference in Madras on February 14, 1916, Gandhi insisted that to achieve independence and autonomy Indians had to pursue the principle of swadeshi or

> that spirit in us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote...In the domain of politics...use of the indigenous institutions...In that of economics...use only [of] things that are produced by...immediate neighbours.[59]

Addressing educated Indians, in particular, he said,

> you have received your education through a foreign tongue...[and] therefore do not react upon the masses...they recognise us not much more than they recognise the English officers...Their aspirations are not ours...And you witness not in reality failure to organise, but want of correspondence between the representatives and the represented.[60]

Through 1917 and 1918 Gandhi applied the novel technique of satyagraha in various instances such as a mill-hands' strike in Ahmedabad in February-March 1918 and a peasant refusal to pay land revenue in the face of a devastating famine in Gujarat in March-April 1918. With the First World War still raging, Gandhi also unexpectedly

---

[59] CW 13:219
[60] CW 13:221

decided to cooperate with the British in the war effort by attempting to recruit Indians to fight abroad in the face of much opposition from various nationalists and even his own supporters. This was a profoundly contradictory and puzzling shift in attitude and strategy that Gandhi was asking Indians to make—offer civil resistance (at great cost) to the British Government and, at the same time, join the British Indian Army overseas to fight an overtly imperialistic war in which Indians had little discernible interest. He tried to justify this bewildering tactic by arguing that military service abroad would serve to keep India from being dominated by yet another alien power (if the British were defeated) and would also serve Indians as a vital program of education in organizational and technical skills that would be tremendously useful (when the war was over) to prosecute the nationalist struggle and national reconstruction more efficiently and effectively.

In a speech at the Gujarat Political Conference on November 3, 1917, Gandhi eschewed the constitutional gradualism that moderate nationalists were pursuing, insisting that "Swaraj is not to be attained through an appeal to the British democracy."[61] However, he was quick to explain that extremism was not the answer either; but declared, "We have to demand swaraj from our own people...When the peasantry of India understands what swaraj is, the demand will become irresistible."[62] Thus the superior struggle for freedom would have to incorporate the masses in direct action and train them to become empowered citizens. Dismissing the need for constitutions and plans of action as prerequisites to independence, Gandhi maintained, "The freedom to err and the power

[61] CW 14:55
[62] CW 14:55

to correct errors is one definition of swaraj."[63] He identified the main stumbling block to gaining true freedom not as the lack of the trappings of a representative democracy, but rather the fact that India was "ever torn by conflict from within."[64] For overcoming this obstacle, "Government of self...[was] the first step...Then the family...[then] if the castes cannot manage their affairs in an orderly manner...how can they be fit for national government?"[65] Progressing along this trajectory of reform beginning at the level of the individual and radiating outwards into larger and more complex social configurations, Gandhi castigated the lack of civic sense among Indians:

> If we cannot regulate the affairs of our cities, if our streets are not kept clean, if our homes are dilapidated and if our roads are crooked, if we cannot command the services of selfless citizens for civic government and those who are in charge of affairs are neglectful or selfish, how shall we claim larger powers?[66]

He criticized Indians for having their "gaze...fixed upon Government" suggesting instead that "Swaraj means managing our own affairs."[67] He continued with an impassioned plea for the adoption of swadeshi that "almost holds the key to swaraj":

> If we have no regard for our own language, if we feel aversion to cloth made in our country, if our dress repels us...if our food is distasteful to us, even our climate is not good enough, our people uncouth and unfit for our company, our

[63] CW 14:54
[64] CW 14:56
[65] CW 14:56
[66] CW 14:56
[67] CW 14:58

civilization ugly and the foreign attractive, in short, if everything native is bad and everything foreign is pleasing to us, I do not know what swaraj can mean for us.[68]

Finally, Gandhi made a crucial demarcation that he reiterated ever afterwards—the distinction between satyagraha (directed outwards in the form of resistance to injustice) and the constructive program (directed inwards in the form of self-discipline and cooperation with others). He urged that the struggle for true freedom "should be twofold...We may petition the Government, we may agitate in the Imperial Council for our rights; but for a real awakening of the people, the more important thing is activities directed inwards."[69]

Addressing the All-India Social Service Conference in Calcutta on December 31, 1917, Gandhi outlined an agenda that he later referred to as his constructive program. He asked Indians, especially, those involved in public affairs

> to revert to your vernaculars...[to] study rural conditions...and draw up a course of instructions for the guidance of workers and of the people at large...[t]o restore to their proper status a fifth of [the] total population [the untouchables] ...[to ensure that women] play their full part in the plan of regeneration."[70]

Finally, he insisted, "if the work is to leave its impress on the nation, we must have workers who are prepared...to dedicate their lives to the cause."[71] This is no elite agenda

---

[68] CW 14:59
[69] CW 14:60
[70] CW 14:123-7
[71] CW 14:128

that can be administered from on high by a mercenary bureaucracy, but a grass-roots plan of action that the people must own and prosecute through their daily life for it to succeed.

Speaking at a women's welfare organization in Bombay on February 20, 1918, Gandhi observed, "In travelling all over India, I have come to realize that all the existing agitation is confined to an infinitesimal section of our people...85 per cent of our people...[live] in a state of total detachment from what is going on around them."[72] He addressed the educated women present "spare as much time as you can to visit the most backward localities in Bombay and give the women there what you have yourselves received."[73] In a pamphlet addressed to volunteers, dated April 17, 1918, Gandhi issued instructions on how they should conduct themselves in satyagraha campaigns and in village work, listed social work opportunities in villages that workers could attend to, and stressed the need for nonviolence as a basic precondition of all volunteer work.[74]

In a speech at Nadiad, Gujarat on June 21, 1918 that inaugurated Gandhi's recruitment campaign for additional volunteers in the ongoing First World War, Gandhi suggested that participation in the war (although against his principle of nonviolence) would enable recruits to become "equals as soldiers...[to] renounce the fear of death...[and] be soldiers in a national army."[75] He argued,

> If the British people have the ability to rule, they do not owe it merely to their physical strength. They have the art [of government], they have skill and

[72] CW 14:203
[73] CW 14:206
[74] CW 14:350-1
[75] CW 14:438

> foresight, shrewdness and wisdom. They know how to deal with people according to their deserts.[76]

Gandhi justified this uncharacteristic appeal thus

> You will learn military discipline as you help the Empire, gain military experience and acquire the strength to defend yourselves...even fight the Empire, should it play foul.[77]

In a speech at Karamsad on July 14, 1918—Gandhi's third speech in the recruiting campaign—he again defended his advocacy of recruitment for war as the least of the prevailing evils facing the Indian people:

> Our villages are no better than dung-hills; we cannot defend ourselves and our families against robbers or wild beasts; [petty officials] coerce and oppress us as they will; we have no arms and we do not know the use of arms. Is this swarajya?[78]

Moreover, he explained, the international political climate at the time rendered no other course of action more feasible or desirable:

> India would be nowhere without Englishmen. If the British do not win, whom shall we go to for claiming equal partnership? Shall we go to the victorious German, or the Turk or the Afghan for it?[79]

Pragmatically motivated though this course of action may have been, many of Gandhi's critics (and even some of his followers) saw in it a fundamental compromise of his

---

[76] CW 14:438
[77] CW 14:438
[78] CW 14:483
[79] CW 14:484

avowed basic convictions and a watering down of his much-publicized commitment to nonviolence as an absolute virtue. Facing charges of inconsistency and backtracking in his utterances and actions, Gandhi advised Indians, in The Times of India on August 10, 1918, that "in their march towards responsible government, they could no longer be satisfied with the ipse dixit of leaders, no matter how great they might be, but that they would continuously have to weigh conflicting opinions and make their choice."[80]

The period of late 1918 to mid-1919 was one of forced rest for Gandhi due to illness. Legislation in February-March 1919 restricting freedom of the press, and the Punjab Government's massacre of hundreds of civilian men and women (for the arguably minor infraction of violating a curfew) at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar, Punjab on April 13, 1919, led to the intensification of anti-British feeling all over India and the demand for more responsible and participatory government. The British Government now found it hard to continue to justify its claim that it stayed in India in the capacity of guardian of law and order and to serve as mentor to incompetent and corrupt Indians in their education in democracy and responsible government.

In a Statement in which he laid down Laws for Civil Disobedience, issued on April 7, 1919, Gandhi cautioned would-be satyagrahis that unless and until they had become "seasoned, disciplined and capable of handling delicately organized movements," they were "to select such laws only as can be disobeyed individually."[81] Moreover, he advised them to "select laws whose civil breach would constitute an education for the people, showing them a clear way out of the difficulties that lie in the

[80] CW 15:14
[81] CW 15:192

path of honest men desiring to do public work."[82] Thus, the civil disobedience movement was to be not just a means of getting wrongs addressed, but also a curriculum for the education of the masses in the essentials of citizenship and empowerment.

In his Satyagraha Leaflet No. 6, published on April 25, 1919, one of many leaflets through which he maintained contact with satyagrahis working all over the country, Gandhi urged them to recognize that satyagraha was essentially an advancement in consciousness and morality rather than just a political tactic for gaining strategic ends. He placed satyagraha at the apex of a hierarchy of altruism and civic responsibility along which societies could be placed depending on the particular stage of their progress:

> Those who recognize the domestic tie and its obligations have to a certain extent gone beyond [the] brute stage...from the family to the village...A still further stage away [is] provincial life...In modern times, in no part of the earth have the people gone beyond the nation stage in the application of satyagraha.[83]

Satyagraha, then, was a way of extending familial sentiments and relationships to the political sphere and it would eventually inform the individual's consciousness of his/her place in and relationship towards society.

In his Satyagraha Leaflet No. 11, published on May 1, 1919, Gandhi again reminded the volunteers that satyagraha was as much an educational program for its participants as a form of political resistance against injustice. Thus, satyagrahis would have "to so act that the people may become trained to participate in the movement in strict accordance with its principles and its fundamental principle is adherence to truth

---

[82] CW 15:192
[83] CW 15:249

and non-violence to person and property."[84] This was an especially poignant point that needed reiterating as violent incidents began to multiply all over the country in the supposedly nonviolent non-cooperation movement.

Pressed from various quarters for advice on a wide range of matters, in a speech at a meeting in Bombay on May 6, 1919, Gandhi asked volunteer workers everywhere to turn their questions inwards and come up with their own responses rather than look to him and other leaders for constant guidance:

> Everyone should know the duty he owes, should ask himself what, having been born in India, he ought to do for her and how. What, having been born in Bombay, did he owe to her? To what end was he a satyagrahi? What was his duty as one? And so on.[85]

Similarly, in a letter to satyagrahis in Surat, Gujarat dated May 20, 1919, Gandhi maintained, "A satyagrihi is ever his own master." [86] While stating that, "when an organization offers satyagraha, individuals should submit themselves to its discipline," Gandhi also held out the possibility for individual initiative in looking for "opportunities for offering satyagraha."[87] In a speech at the founding of a school for girls in Ahmedabad, Gujarat on June 29, 1919, Gandhi exhorted those present to "not be afraid of making mistakes, nor of experimenting" or they would "lag behind."[88] He urged the

---

[84] CW 15:265
[85] CW 15:284
[86] CW 15:315
[87] CW 15:315
[88] CW 15:409-10

founders of the school to "go on making experiments within the frame-work of their principles" but also to "correct the mistakes" that they would inevitably make.[89]

On July 1, 1919, Gandhi started his first newspaper in India—Navajivan, or "New Life"—in the Gujarati language.[90] In the inaugural issue, he explicated the rationale that motivated this publication:

> I think I have a service to render to India by delivering a message to her. Some ideas I have come by as a result of my thinking are such as will advance us towards our welfare. It has ever been my endeavour to explain these. I have not succeeded as well as I should have liked to for want of ability or time or favourable circumstances...One powerful modern means for this purpose is the newspaper.[91]

By this time, Gandhi was a fairly well known public personage to many Indians, including the rural population, by followers who "traveled far and wide and vernacular newspapers [that] published regularly and prominently" articles on Gandhi and his activism.[92] Major factors that contributed to the increase in Gandhi's followers across the subcontinent were the "growth of education and lack of suitable employment." [93] Moreover, Gandhi's image and the nature of his activism enabled "the poor, unarmed and

---

[89] CW 15:409-10
[90] The English versions of the Gujarati editorials, consulted in this chapter, were provided by the publishers of the Collected Works—Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India.
[91] CW 15:420
[92] Pradhan 49
[93] Pradhan 53

inert" to find a place in it, and were able to attract identification and participation even from women and children.[94]

Anxious to reach this large (and growing) audience that he could not personally contact, Gandhi relied increasingly on the print media throughout his career to communicate with volunteer workers across the subcontinent and even engage them in limited dialogue through letters to the editor, and question-and-answer sections. Volunteer workers were urged to read these publications aloud to villagers and translate them, if they could, to other volunteers not proficient in the Gujarati language. Pradhan notes a development in Orissa (eastern India), during this time, that was replicated in many other parts of the subcontinent: "Many provincial leaders published newspapers, prepared and circulated pamphlets, toured the distant parts of Orissa, held meetings and invited top national leaders of the Congress to address the people."[95]

In a speech to satyagrahis at Nadiad, Gujarat on July 6, 1919, Gandhi pointed out that while satyagraha "is being brought into play on a large scale on the political field for the first time, it is in an experimental stage" and, therefore, he was "ever making new discoveries."[96] He insisted that only that worker "is able and attains the right to offer civil disobedience who has known how to offer voluntary and deliberate obedience."[97] He stressed that, for satyagraha to work, it must be recognized as being only the negative half (nonviolent resistance by way of non-cooperation with and civil disobedience against unjust authority) of a larger enterprise that included a positive aspect (self-discipline and

[94] Pradhan 50-1
[95] Pradhan 65
[96] CW 15:436
[97] CW 15:436

cooperation for mutual welfare). The positive half he recommended as "constructive work" that included participation in the swadeshi (local economic self-sufficiency) movement as also the promotion of other reforms such as the eradication of untouchability, the uplift of women, etc. He called for "a large number of volunteers" to participate in this enterprise "whose sole qualification needs to be perfect honesty and love of the country."[98]

In 1919, a mass petition for the revocation of the Rowlatt Act (curtailing freedom of the press) failed and, once again, Gandhi launched a satyagraha campaign for its repeal. Moreover, to address the severe and chronic poverty endemic in rural India, Gandhi began to promote swadeshi or local self-sufficiency at the village level in a more concerted and systematic manner through the outreach programs of his ashram. He also took up the publication of Young India—an English-language newspaper (rather, a "viewspaper," as Gandhi put it) to educate public opinion on political matters—an area of sore neglect even in urban areas—and to encourage youth (especially educated urban youth) to engage in grassroots social service. The attention to an English-literate audience was important as some of them already made periodic forays into the rural hinterland on propaganda tours but accomplished very little. Such tours became almost mandatory, and included organization-building and service components, when Gandhi initiated a satyagraha campaign. At such times, volunteers "visited weekly market places…to address the people in their own language...Women Gandhians visited houses

[98] CW 15:437

in the villages to seek the support of womenfolk…celebrated important days…arranged meetings" and so on.[99]

In Young India, on August 2, 1919, Gandhi called for "trustworthy volunteers" to assist in relief work in the aftermath of the Punjab Government's massacre of civilians disobeying a curfew at Jalianwala Baug in Amritsar, Punjab. Anxious to ensure that this initiative should not turn into another violent confrontation, he asked volunteers to "go merely as a trustee to distribute funds under the guidance and directions…not to air…political views" and held that "Real success in national work can only be assured when workers develop the quality of losing themselves in their work to the exclusion of every other work for the time being."[100]

Speaking at a meeting of Untouchables at Dohad, Gujarat on August 31, 1919, he offered similarly cautious advice, requesting them "to keep patience" and assuring them that the "Hindu atmosphere is changing, though slowly but steadily."[101] Characteristically, he also expressed the "wish that [they] should make great efforts to remedy their own shortcomings…to give up their habit of drinking" as a way of disciplining themselves to prepare for the assumption of the greater duties and responsibilities that went with the claim of greater rights.[102]

In Young India, on September 14, 1919, Gandhi urged volunteers and their followers to take up activism in the spirit of satyagraha, which required self-discipline and nonviolence in all social relations, as a result of which the nationalist movement

---

[99] Pradhan 89-90
[100] CW 16:2-3
[101] CW 16:83
[102] CW 16:83

could shed "much fuss, all too many pompous speeches, petitions and resolutions and much scheming."[103] By this time, Gandhi's renunciation of family and career and changes in lifestyle encouraged the formation of a religious dimension to his public image. The widespread circulation of photographs of the ascetic-looking Gandhi, as also his supporters' organization of mass hymn-singing near temples and other religious places, "enlarge[d] Gandhi's personality" in the eyes of the common people and encouraged a widespread belief in his "divinity."[104] This contributed to Gandhi's ability to speak to large sections of the population with religious and moral authority.

In Navajivan, on October 5, 1919, he insisted that the freedom movement did "not need long speeches or legislative assemblies or laws...[but only] a few sincere and willing workers...[who] by their own exemplary conduct and spirit of service [would] bring about the necessary transformation in every village."[105] Moreover, he claimed, these volunteers would not have to be "highly educated" and "even money would not be necessary for such work" but what was indispensable was their "character and religious zeal."[106] In a speech at Baroda on October 9, 1919, Gandhi urged nationalist leaders to consider themselves the people's "servants" and rid themselves of all "thought of processions" and other forms of pomp.[107]

In Navajivan, on October 19, 1919, Gandhi provided prospective constructive workers with a detailed protocol for pursuing rural reform: immersion in the village, involvement of the worker's own family (if relevant), community building, organization

---

[103] CW 16:124
[104] Pradhan 89-91
[105] CW 16:214-5
[106] CW 16:214-5
[107] CW 16:230

of the villagers for concerted action, nonviolent response to resistance that the worker might face, the need to carry on social work as a solitary exemplar if necessary, priority to sanitation and hygiene, education next, then medical attention and, finally, political education and organization.[108]

In an editorial appearing in Navajivan on October 26, 1919 and, again, in Young India on November 5, 1919, Gandhi reiterated the need to appreciate that his project encompassed two complementary aspects:

> The spheres of satyagraha are swadeshi, social reforms and political reform...[and] He to whom satyagraha means nothing more than civil disobedience has never understood satyagraha...Only he who thoroughly knows how to construct may destroy.[109]

In Young India, on December 10, 1919, he elaborated his concept of swadeshi declaring that it was "the real reform that India needs" because the "immediate problem before us is not how to run the government of the country, but how to feed and clothe ourselves."[110] Gandhi recognized that the adoption of such a political agenda rather than the constitutional craftsmanship that India's elite was preoccupied with would entail "a revolution in our mental outlook," and because swadeshi "is a revolution," through it lay "the way to swaraj."[111]

In Navajivan, on December 21, 1919, Gandhi called upon nationalist leaders, especially Congressmen, to attend more closely to the "common people [who] now want

---

[108] CW 16:243-4
[109] CW 16:260
[110] CW 16:335
[111] CW 16:336

to play their part, are ready for self-sacrifice, but do not know the way."[112] He also reminded educated Indians, in general, that as long as they "do not speak to the people in their own language, what can they understand? How can they understand?" and, by extension, how effective could they expect their leadership to be?[113] Calling for the replacement of English with Hindi as the language of the nationalist movement, Gandhi observed, in Young India on January 21, 1920, "Congress has been national throughout all these long years only as a spectacle but never for its real educative value."[114] As Judith Brown observes, the Indian National Congress, founded in 1885,

> ...was a loose confederation of local men interested in the distribution, use, and abuse of public power, who found it mutually profitable to meet at Christmas time to air their fears and aspirations, and possibly to make demands of government, and to plan joint action...[with] the almost total absence of institutional organization...[and] no formal constitution until 1899.[115]

The Congress remained little changed until Gandhi transformed its demographics and organizational architecture, and helped draw up a new constitution after his return to India in 1914.

The Acid Test: Dutiful Citizenship through Non-Cooperation

In 1920 Gandhi launched the "Non-cooperation Movement"—a systematic refusal on the part of Indians at various levels in society to cooperate with the Government in some of their strategic dealings with it. He was trying to capitalize on the widespread

---

[112] CW 16:347
[113] CW 16:347
[114] CW 16:493
[115] Modern India 183

discontent over the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms that conceded a measure of local self-government to India (under the Constitution of 1919) that most nationalists found unsatisfactory. There was also discontent among Indian Muslims over the abolition of the Caliphate of Baghdad (the foremost leader of Islam) after the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire through the Treaty of Sevres in 1919, and the unsatisfactory arrangements made for the custody of the holy shrines of Islam so far under Ottoman protection. Gandhi saw, in this crisis, an opportunity to woo more Muslims to join the Congress and, thus, included this cause in the Congress agenda.

In an "open letter" to the members of the All-India Home Rule League—an activist group within the Congress—appearing in Young India on April 28, 1920, Gandhi agreed to abandon his "position of splendid isolation"[116] and formally join the League. So far, he had meticulously avoided any overt membership in any political party or organization. He acknowledged that the All-India Home Rule League was greatly suited "for the advancement of [his] causes," and, though its good offices, he might also ensure "quicker and better results" for them.[117] He listed his causes as "swadeshi, Hindu-Mohammedan unity...the acceptance of Hindustani as the lingua franca and a linguistic redistribution of the Provinces"—notably all elements of what would become his constructive program.[118] However, he did "confess" that political reforms enjoyed only "a secondary place in my scheme of national reorganization" because, he maintained, if

[116] CW 17:347
[117] CW 17:347-8
[118] CW 17:348

the elements of the constructive program "could but absorb national energy, [they] would bring about all the reforms that the most ardent extremists can ever desire."[119]

On May 5, 1920, Gandhi presented, in Young India, the "definite, progressive four stages" in which his Non-Cooperation Movement would have to proceed, viz., "the giving up of titles and resignation of honorary posts," mass resignation from "Government service," mass "withdrawal" from the ranks of the police and the military and, finally, "suspension of taxes."[120] In Navajivan, on May 9, 1920, he exhorted "those who have accepted service of the land as an article of faith...[to] stand outside the lists" (of candidates for elections to local self-government bodies provided under the Constitution of 1919) as they would find themselves "better occupied by educating the electorate and keeping the elected members to their promises at the polls."[121] This was the first instance in which Gandhi explicitly called for the formation of a body of public workers who would stay aloof from the formal political process while continuing to exert an influence over it—an appeal that grew more frequent and strident over the next two-and-a-half decades. In Navajivan, on June 27, 1920, Gandhi declared for the umpteenth time that the cause of independence would not be served "by finding fault with and hating the British" but rather by making efforts to "get rid of the shortcomings which enabled the British to get a hold" in India.[122] Characteristically, the shortcomings that Gandhi identified were moral: "our inveterate selfishness, our inability to make sacrifices for the country, our dishonesty, our timidity, our hypocrisy and our ignorance."[123]

---

[119] CW 17:348
[120] CW 17:389-90
[121] CW 17:395
[122] CW 17:516
[123] CW 17:517

In late 1920, Gandhi went on a "country-wide tour of mass education" in which he castigated the British Empire and the Government of India for exploiting and brutalizing the Indian people. During this campaign of mass education he also sought to draw public attention to the evils in Indian society that had nothing to do with the British presence. It was also during this time that the new constitution that Gandhi helped draw up for the Congress as well as the inclusion of a range of hitherto ignored constituencies (such as women, untouchables, and rural elites) transformed the Congress from an elite debating society to a mass organization more truly representative of the pluralism of the subcontinent.

In a speech on the Rights and Duties of Labor in Madras, on August 15, 1920, Gandhi asked labor leaders to guide their followers "not by giving [them] a knowledge of letters, but a knowledge of human affairs and human relations."[124] Directly addressing the workers present, Gandhi placed the onus of their enlightenment and betterment on themselves:

> ...it is necessary to understand your obligations to the nation to which you belong...find out the affairs of your country in the best manner you can...who are your governors, what are your duties in relation to them, what they can do to you and what you can do to them...it is your bounden duty to understand your responsibilities and your duties as citizens of this great land.[125]

This was an appeal he reiterated a week later at a similar meeting when he pointed out that there were "so many movements going on in the country in connection with politics"

---

[124] CW 18:165
[125] CW 18:167

and it was the duty of the common people "to understand them and find [their] place in them."[126]

Promoting his concept of swadeshi, in Young India, on August 25, 1920, as a platform of political action that ordinary people could participate in easily and substantially, he declared that if millions would

> ...refuse to wear or use foreign cloth and be satisfied with the simple cloth that we can produce in our homes, it will be proof of our organizing ability, energy, co-operation and self-sacrifice that will enable us to secure all we need...[and] a striking demonstration of national solidarity.[127]

In Young India, on September 1, 1920, he exhorted the public to "know the strength of the Government with which we are engaged in a fierce struggle...crafty in the main, godless, untruthful, but courageous, able, self-sacrificing and possessing great powers of organization."[128] Urging workers and nationalists to not underestimate the power of the British Empire, Gandhi also recommended that any successful freedom movement would require Indians to "meet [British] craftiness by simplicity and openness, godlessness by godliness, untruthfulness by truthfulness" and "match its courage with greater ability, sacrifice with greater self-sacrifice, and its organizing powers with greater organizing powers" failing which Indians "must be content to occupy a status of servility."[129] As he pointed out, time and again, the wholehearted promotion of the constructive program was

---

[126] CW Supp.1: 221
[127] CW 18:197
[128] CW 18:222
[129] CW 18:222

the best way to cultivate those virtues and abilities that would turn Indians into empowered citizens who would inevitably make British rule impossible.

Three weeks later, in Young India, Gandhi reminded English-literate (mainly urban) volunteers, who made sporadic forays into the rural areas to spread propaganda and instructions relating to the non-cooperation movement, that to "make real headway" they must "train the masses...who have a heart of gold, who feel for the country, who want to be taught and led."[130] Thus, the need of the hour was "a few intelligent, sincere, local workers...and the whole nation [could] be organized to act intelligently, and democracy...evolved out of mobocracy."[131] In Navajivan, on October 3, 1920, Gandhi extended this appeal to women who generally "keep aloof from the things which really matter for the nation's welfare," stating that "[w]omen alone can work and achieve great results among women."[132] In the early twentieth century, when most upper-class women were almost invisible in public life, this was a radical move and it did not go down well with many high-caste Hindus and high-class Muslims, even within the Congress. Gandhi suggested the extension of this framework of grassroots action by ordinary people in his recommendations for ameliorating Hindu-Muslim relations in Young India on October 6, 1920—that "every village and hamlet" must have "at least one Hindu and one Muslim whose primary business must be to prevent quarrels."[133] He lamented the fact that "public workers...made little attempt to understand and influence the masses and least of all the most turbulent among them."[134]

---

[130] CW 18:275
[131] CW 18:275
[132] CW 18:320
[133] CW 18:326
[134] CW 18:326

At the height of the Non-Cooperation Movement, violence and other disturbances impermissible in a true satyagraha campaign were spreading and, even when violence was absent, the unprecedented mass movement that Gandhi had initiated resulted in great confusion, even in public meetings that he attended. In Young India, on October 20, 1920, he observed that the "chaos and disorder" that attended so many aspects of the Non-Cooperation Movement was "not for want of men but because of volunteers without training...called upon to handle a situation and crowds that are unprecedented."[135] Describing the receptions he would generally receive as "a unique demonstration of love run mad," he regarded them as a natural expression of an "expectant and believing people groaning under misery and insult" who believed that he had "a message of hope for them."[136] Nevertheless, he cautioned, the "great task before the nation" was to produce leaders who would "discipline its demonstrations if they [were] to serve any useful purpose."[137]

In Young India, on October 27, 1920, Gandhi drew attention to the plight of the untouchables by declaring that Indians were the "pariahs of the Empire" much like the untouchables and that this was "retributive justice meted out...by a just God."[138] However, wary of mobilizing this deeply frustrated constituency into active protest that might well add to the existing chaos and violence, Gandhi pointed out that their quest for empowerment would necessitate "organized intelligent effort" and as there was "no leader...[to] lead them to victory through non-co-operation," (and nonviolence) it was

---

[135] CW 18:360
[136] CW 18:361
[137] CW 18:361
[138] CW 18:375

better for them "heartily to join the great national movement...[to throw] off the slavery of the present Government" as a first step.[139] This advice, however, many untouchable leaders and critics of Gandhi found unacceptable, accusing him of minimizing the brutal atrocities that untouchables suffered at the hands of high-caste Hindus by asking them to privilege the more distant anti-British campaign over their far more immediate struggle for survival and a decent place in society.

Responding to the continued chaotic conditions, at a speech at a public meeting in Nadiad on November 1, 1920, Gandhi urged the volunteer workers to "develop such discipline" as prevailed within the Government wherein "[n]ot one of its men either speaks or acts without orders from his superiors."[140] This seems to be a radical departure from Gandhi's earlier insistence on volunteer workers thinking for themselves and acting on their own initiative. In Navajivan, on November 7, 1920, Gandhi noted the sluggish performance of the Non-Cooperation Movement and attributed this state to the fact that Indians "live like pebbles...cannot work as a team...[and] lack the power to draw others...or be drawn to others...[except] out of blind faith."[141] Cautioning the restive untouchable constituency once more in a speech at Satara, on November 7, 1920, Gandhi warned them that they would accomplish nothing "by abusing Brahmins" and that, by "looking to the English for help," they would "sink deeper into slavery."[142]

The Non-Cooperation Movement intensified in late 1920 and early 1921. In a speech at a students' meeting at Allahabad (during the North Indian leg of his tour), on

---

[139] CW 18:377
[140] CW 18:412
[141] CW 18:445
[142] CW 18:448-9

November 30, 1920, Gandhi reverted to his earlier stance of laying the responsibility for insight and creative initiative at the door of the individual, perhaps because they (students) might be expected to behave in a more thoughtful and disciplined manner than the "mob":

> If what you want is to be my slaves, I have nothing to do with you...I do not want any help from such persons...If you are thinking of coming out in the hope of being able to stand with [my] strength...remain standing where you are...I have nothing to give you in the way of excitement...I want to give you quiet courage...if my voice is not the voice of your conscience...do not listen[143]

Speaking at a meeting in Calcutta, on December 13, 1920, he commented on the poor response to and, therefore, the poor performance of the Non-Cooperation Movement in spite of the prevalence of an organized nationalist movement from 1885 (the foundation of the Congress). He blamed Congressmen for failing "these 35 years to...permeate the masses," stating that all they did was "sit upon the pedestal and from there deliver harangues to them in a language they do not understand."[144] Speaking to students at Dacca, Bengal (on the eastern leg of his tour), on December 15, 1920, he exhorted them to understand that the Non-Cooperation Movement was essentially "a battle of self-purification" that required its participants to "exercise common self-restraint...exercise [their] own judgment and not slavishly follow anybody else."[145] This was another of Gandhi's "somersaults" that seems to contradict some of his earlier utterances (in this instance, his speech to volunteer workers on November 1, 1920). A possible explanation

---

[143] CW 19:50-1
[144] CW 19:103-4
[145] CW 19:128

is that the audience he addressed earlier were not formally educated and, therefore, ostensibly less able to rely on their own resources than students who, by virtue of their education and superior socio-economic position, might be expected to be more self-reliant.

In Navajivan on December 29, 1920, Gandhi continued his appeal to individual resourcefulness, declaring that it was "very dangerous, in this age, for anyone to accept another as a guru or be another's guru" and that, while he welcomed "people being followers of [his] ideas," he wanted "no one to be [his] follower."[146] Referring to the sufferings that many non-cooperators were undergoing, in Young India, on January 12, 1921, he noted that the Non-Cooperation Movement could be rendered feasible only by the nation abandoning its superfluities, its questionable habits, and its vices."[147] A week later, he reiterated that Indians were not just fighting for political freedom, but were "engaged in a spiritual war" and were "not living in normal times" and, therefore, had to "suspend...normal activities" and dedicate themselves to the struggle for true freedom—a quest predominantly personal and engaging every aspect of lived experience, not just formal politics.[148]

Gandhi launched a drive to expand the numerical strength and demographic composition of the Congress in Young India on February 2, 1921, insisting that there "should not be a single village left without a Congress organization and no village register should be left without a single adult male or female on it."[149] Gandhi appealed

---

[146] CW 19:180
[147] CW 19:222
[148] CW 19:240
[149] CW 19:317

for "honest and industrious workers" to volunteer in the execution of this huge program.[150] In a speech at the Benares Town Hall, on February 9, 1921, Gandhi complained that he had got "rather tired of meetings" in which much energy is wasted by national workers "in strangling one another" and in which the nation's prospective leaders could not "even keep peace."[151] He reiterated, on February 20, 1921, that the purpose of the Non-cooperation Movement was "not to produce an effect on the British but to become, ourselves, pure, firm, courageous, and fearless."[152]

On February 23, 1921, Gandhi again pushed for "establishing a Congress agency in every village with a proper electorate" and insisted that this ambitious program entailed "not a large measure of sacrifice but ability to organize and to take simple, concerted action"—something the largest political party in the subcontinent should be able to accomplish given its claim to represent all Indians and enjoy their confidence and cooperation.[153] In a speech at Bombay, on March 15, 1921, Gandhi explained that he regarded the inmates of his ashram as his "reserve force" and did not wish to "use them for winning independence and fighting the British" as their role in public affairs would "arise after independence."[154] In the meanwhile, the ashram inmates had to endure "a long penance, doing constructive work" and thus prepare themselves for the leadership role they would have to assume in the grassroots revolution after India had won formal

[150] CW 19:317
[151] CW 19:344
[152] CW 19:375
[153] CW 19:384
[154] CW Supp.1:233

political independence from the British Empire.[155] In Navajivan, on March 27, 1921, Gandhi had this to say to career politicians:

> ...all who go about making speeches [should] stop speaking and engage themselves wholly in work. If they must speak, let them criticize the people for their lethargy, their selfishness, or inspire them to greater effort by admiring, wherever seen, their courage and their self-sacrifice.[156]

In 1921, Gandhi initiated the slogan "Swaraj in one year." However, he cautioned his supporters and the Congress that the realization of his promise was contingent upon their adoption of swadeshi in their personal lives, the observation of perfect non-violence in their resistance to the government, and in the extent and sincerity of their attempts to foster communal unity—among Hindus and Muslims, and among caste Hindus and untouchables. It was also at this time that he clearly articulated "the relationship between non-co-operation and civil disobedience" declaring that the latter was "the acutest form" of the former.[157] Moreover, he declared that the country, in general, was not ready to engage in civil disobedience that required much more discipline and self-restraint than non-cooperation, and suggested, instead, mass participation in activities that he later subsumed under the rubric of the constructive program. He reminded the newly elected councilors of the Surat Municipality, on April 19, 1921, that they had "been elected to get the city cleaned of its refuse, to look after the health of the people, to provide education for the children and to prevent diseases" and not to engage in power politics for the

---

[155] CW Supp.1:233
[156] CW 19:482
[157] CW 20:229

furtherance of personal interests.[158] On May 4, 1921, defending his decision to suspend the Non-cooperation Movement that had gotten violent and chaotic, Gandhi insisted that the country was not "ripe" for civil disobedience; and it was necessary to shun the "anarchy of the mob" as well as "the anarchy of the [British] Government" both of which were equally unacceptable.[159]

Rather than violently attacking the government, Gandhi insisted that gaining true freedom lay in the cultivation of "honesty, unity, firmness, organizing power, capacity to build up national trade, countrywide spirit of patriotism, indomitable courage and spirit of self-sacrifice."[160] He deplored the "din, noise and bustle" that characterized so much public activity and that betrayed a "want of forethought, management and organization" and advised seasoned volunteer workers to become "disciplined to handle mass movements in a sober and methodical manner…[through] training of volunteers" who had just joined the movement.[161] He reiterated that the masses were not "yet instructed enough for…political strikes" and when they did strike, it simply led to "an atmosphere of unsettled unrest" that hindered the nationalist movement rather than helped it.[162] He declared that there would be "full swaraj" only when "the Congress commands complete confidence and willing obedience to its instructions" and when it did so it would have become "the most united, the strongest in character and the largest organization in the land."[163]

---

[158] CW 20:9
[159] CW 20:61
[160] CW 20:80
[161] CW 20:107
[162] CW 20:228
[163] CW 20:293

Pointing to the huge program of internal reform that would be needed to gain true freedom—not just the removal of the British presence from India—Gandhi reminded Indians that the expensive, indifferent, and corrupt colonial administration did not comprise "Englishmen merely" but also the "thousands of Indians trained by them" to perpetuate a "vicious system that taints all who belong to it."[164] Acknowledging that there were a large number of volunteers to carry out the work that was needed, he lamented that most of them were "not yet fully aware of their responsibilities…[and] lack[ed] training."[165] He urged the nationalists to "look upon the training of volunteers as an essential part of our struggle."[166]

By the end of 1921, however, Gandhi conceded that India would not be able to win freedom within the "one year" deadline that he had set in 1920, and admitted that this failure on the part of Indians to earn it was very disheartening to him. He undertook a "pilgrimage," traveling the length and breadth of the subcontinent. During this tour, he sought to increase mass participation in the Non-Cooperation Movement but found little encouraging response to his appeal for constructive workers.

In Young India, on August 25, 1921, he urged Congressmen to "conform to laws and rules that we ourselves now make" and reminded them that, if "Congress organizations are to work efficiently, all the instructions of the Working Committee should be faithfully and promptly carried out."[167] He declared "In India, what we want now is not hero-worship, but service…more and more servants for the country."[168] He

---

[164] CW 20:461
[165] CW 20:512
[166] CW 20:512
[167] CW 21:13
[168] CW 21:73

criticized the "loud shouts of victory" that often met his public appearances and complained that his "ears cannot endure them" as they were "an indication of unthinking adoration, which profits neither the people nor me," causing him to "shiver in fear when setting out for meetings."[169] Addressing volunteers and Congress members, he said you "have interested yourselves in national service...[and] have not until recently studied the wants and aspirations of [the lower] classes, nor taken the trouble of informing them of the political situation."[170] He urged them not to exploit the masses "for political or any other ends" and advised "the best service you can render them and take from them at the present stage is to teach them self-help, to give them an idea of their own duties and rights, and put them in a position to secure redress of their own just grievances."[171]

Promoting the hand-made textile industry as the most likely tool for the alleviation of rural poverty as well as the awakening of the political consciousness of the masses, Gandhi pointed out, in Young India of November 3, 1921, that its "successful reintroduction does need skilful endeavour, honesty and co-operation on the largest scale known to the world" and that "if India [could] achieve this co-operation" she would have "by that one act achieved swaraj."[172]

The Failed Experiment: Back to the Drawing Board

In early 1922, Gandhi called off the Non-Cooperation Movement after a violent attack by a mob on a police station at Chauri Chaura in Bihar in which several policemen were locked in the station and burned to death. He attributed the failure of the Non-

---

[169] CW 21:139
[170] CW 21:163
[171] CW 21:163
[172] CW 21:391

Cooperation Movement to retain its nonviolent character to the poor performance of the volunteer workers who had been active all over the country. This was a diagnosis that Gandhi would repeat over and over throughout his political career, ascribing even the failure of the constructive program to the lack of dedicated and sustained effort on the part of workers rather than making any attempt to review and revise the constructive program itself. The suspension of satyagraha seriously undermined Gandhi's political leadership and critics and followers alike were frustrated by his "somersaults."

Calling for more volunteers to take on the time-consuming and demanding work that was needed at the grassroots level throughout the subcontinent, in Young India, on January 5, 1922, Gandhi declared that as "a growingly popular organization" the Congress "should be able to have enough number of unpaid honest volunteers" since "No institution is worth keeping that does not command local support by reason of its own moral strength."[173] If this peaceful revolution in Indians' attitudes, values, and conduct did not occur alongside the effort to expel the British, Gandhi warned, "when the Government relinquishes power, it is the rowdies who will rule."[174] He urged Congress members and volunteer workers to "recognize that there is a great difference between power and swaraj" and criticized them for "fighting merely for power and authority."[175] He reminded the readers of Young India, "Swaraj means self-rule, rule over oneself;" whereas in "a scramble for power, everyone wants to be the first, so everyone fights against everyone else."[176]

---

[173] CW 22:135
[174] CW 22:235
[175] CW 22:236
[176] CW 22:236

In two issues of Young India, on February 2, 1922 and on February 16, 1922, Gandhi systematically outlined for the first time a list of activities and programs that he would describe then onwards as the "constructive program," and explained that the adoption of this agenda as an inseparable part of the nationalist movement was undertaken "with a view to perfecting the internal organization" of the nationalist movement and to ensure that it was capable of the constructive work that would be so crucial once the British had left and the real task of nation-building would have begun.[177] At this point in his project, the constructive program comprised the promotion of handmade textiles, the opening of national schools with a revised curriculum more suited to Indian conditions and needs, the amelioration of the plight of the depressed classes, the promotion of temperance, and efforts to build unity among Muslims, Hindus, and the Untouchables.

Continuing his promotion of the constructive program as the spearhead of the nationalist movement, Gandhi insisted that any effort to initiate civil disobedience against the government necessitated "intensifying constructive and productive activities," as it was only from the training and experience that these activities required that volunteer workers and the masses would find "the strength for civil disobedience."[178] In an interview given to The Bombay Chronicle, on February 15, 1922, Gandhi maintained that it was only in the constructive program and no other political enterprise that "there is enough work and enough variety for every real worker."[179] In Young India on March 2, 1922 Gandhi assured volunteer workers and Congress workers that the constructive

[177] CW 22:379
[178] CW 22:391
[179] CW 22:404

program "will steady and calm us...wake our organizing spirit...make us industrious...render us fit for swaraj...cool our blood."[180] He declared that his leadership of the nationalist movement would be "perfectly useless" if he were not able to "convince co-workers and the public of the absolute and immediate necessity of vigorously prosecuting the constructive programme."[181] He contended that the nationalist movement would be best helped if volunteer workers and Congress members were to "abandon defensive civil disobedience and concentrate all energy on the tasteless but health-giving economic and social reform" that they had hitherto dismissed as a distraction from real political work.[182]

Strengthening Foundations and Building Bridges

For nearly two years—1922 to 1924—Gandhi served his first prison sentence in India for his role in the Non-Cooperation Movement that had turned violent. During his imprisonment and in the absence of his mediating presence, Congressmen became divided over whether or not to participate in the new institutions of local self-government created by the 1919 Constitution. Moreover, during this period Hindu-Muslim relations deteriorated. Gandhi, however, continued to promote constructive work as the main plank for popular participation as well as the best framework within which the various political parties could come together on a coherent and cohesive nationalist platform. But the country seemed more indifferent to his appeals in 1924 (when he was released from prison) than it had been in 1920-21.

---

[180] CW 22:490
[181] CW 22:490
[182] CW 22:503

In Navajivan, on April 20, 1924, Gandhi cautioned volunteer workers and Congressmen against any impatience in pursuing non-cooperation and civil disobedience against the government: "Before starting any movement, it is essential to assess the extent of the support likely to be extended by the people... if the people are not ready, it will be harmful from every point of view to start any movement on their behalf.[183] Upon his release from imprisonment, in 1924, Gandhi set about redesigning and restructuring the Congress to make it more inclusive, cohesive, and efficient. He was, unlike most Congressmen, against "Council-entry" or participation in local self-government under the 1919 Constitution because he thought it would divert the attention of Congressmen away from the vital work of rural reconstruction and to the useless and potentially divisive work of electioneering and wrangling of representative politics. However, he reluctantly came to accept it as an inevitable but limited item on the Congress agenda when he realized how many Congressmen were in favor of participation in local self-government.

Addressing volunteer workers and Congressmen in Young India, on May 8, 1924, he stressed the experimental nature of their struggle for true freedom. What they were attempting—not mere formal political independence from Britain, but a struggle for a more comprehensive autonomy and self-determination—was not to be acquired by following an established blueprint or plan of action because it was an unprecedented struggle and required much improvisation and progress through trial and error.

> We must dare to act according to our honest conviction even though there may be danger of our making terrible mistakes. Swaraj is a way of government by tests, trials and mistakes. It is a thousand times better that we are undone through our

[183] CW 23:471

mistakes than that we avoid them through the perpetual guidance of a man be he ever so wise.[184]

Gandhi also suggested that his prominent presence in the independence movement and his reputation as a "mahatma" (great soul) was probably serving to hinder the autonomy and independent action of the other volunteer workers and Congressmen and speculated as to "whether it would not be in the best interests of the country for me to retire altogether from all public activity."[185] Rabindranath Tagore, a Nobel laureate poet from Bengal, first referred to Gandhi as "mahatma" owing to his dedication to nonviolence and his conviction that the true reform and regeneration of India would have to be moral before it became anything else. On getting to know and work closely with Gandhi, however, Tagore grew less appreciative of Gandhi's ideology and project that had little in common with his, grounded as they were in the Enlightenment; but the title stuck and was widely used. It was a title that Gandhi often invoked ironically to point out the discrepancy in his followers' words and deeds, and sometimes found burdensome and preferred to have abolished altogether.

He continued to insist that the constructive program must be executed alongside satyagraha campaigns (whether of non-cooperation or civil disobedience) stating that "construction must keep pace with destruction" because India's independence movement was "not one for mere change of personnel but for change of the system and the methods" as well.[186] He contrasted the two Congress factions' approaches in terms of the methods they had decided to use in their struggle for freedom and self-determination,

---

[184] CW 24:11
[185] CW 24:11
[186] CW 24:13

implicitly favoring the "No-Change" school (those refusing to participate in the limited local self-government afforded by the Constitution of 1919) over the so-called Swarajists who saw the opportunity to engage in limited local self-government as an opportunity to train for greater participation in the future.

> The Swarajist method cultivates British opinion and looks to the British Parliament for swaraj. The No-change method looks to the people for it...While one school claims to give political education through the Councils, the other claims to give it exclusively by working among the people and evoking its organizing and administrative capacity. One teaches to look up to a Government for popular progress, the other tries to show that even the most ideal government plays among a self-governing people the least important part in national growth. One teaches the people that the constructive programme alone cannot achieve swaraj, the other teaches the people that it and it alone can achieve it.[187]

Insisting that the constructive program afforded greater opportunities for training leaders and the masses alike in the responsibilities of self-government, on August 14, 1924 Gandhi asked the readers of Young India to "imagine what concentration, method, business habits, honesty, organizing ability and co-operation must be required" for the implementation of even a single element of the constructive program—the revival of the handmade textile industry.[188]

Throughout 1924 and into 1925 Gandhi continued to strive to establish working relationships and common agendas between Hindus and Muslims, various factions in the

---

[187] CW 24:339-40
[188] CW 24:570

Congress and between the Congress and other political parties, insisting that although Indians might find many issues and values incompatible and divisive, they would have to constantly look for common ground on which they could bring themselves to cooperate with one another to present a united front against the British and work for their mutual welfare. He admonished the leaders of the various parties and factions for not prosecuting the independence movement with the necessary zeal, declaring that they had "only played at it...[and] neither sacrificed ease, nor time, much less money at all commensurate with the work required."[189] In a speech at a public meeting at Surat, on September 5, 1924, he reminded them that "Swaraj demands hard back-breaking work" and just as one does not "carry out...household tasks by speeches, writings or sermons," the nationalist movement also could not be effective through these means alone but "only if every one of its members fulfils his allotted function."[190]

In Young India, on September 11, 1924, he pointed out that volunteer workers must be more autonomous and act on their own initiative if they were to be effective as it was "difficult to pass on decisions from moment to moment and from day to day" because "action must vary with every varying circumstance." On the other hand, he declared that, among the various political parties and factions, "differences are increasing" as each of them were "making of its programme a matter of principle...weakening one another and to that extent helping the system...all are seeking to destroy." He urged them to "find out the lowest common measure" among themselves and invited them all "to co-operate on the Congress platform for achieving that common

[189] CW 25:25
[190] CW 25:93

measure." He reminded them that participation in at least one of the elements of the constructive program was indispensable to their effort as without "the work of internal development" that it afforded there would be "no effective external political pressure."[191]

Later in the editorial, Gandhi prodded the Congress to "progressively represent the masses...[who] have no political consciousness...come in living touch with them...share their sorrows, understand their difficulties and anticipate their wants." He insisted that the greatest need of the nationalist movement was for "an effective, swift-moving, cohesive, responsive organization containing intelligent, industrious national workers" that would "give a better account...than a cumbrous and slow body with no mind of its own." The best way of increasing their "internal strength beyond expectation" would be to "simply unite to make the...constructive programme a success."[192]

In Young India, on October 2, 1924, Gandhi declared that the independence movement had "Hitherto...been a struggle and a yearning for a change of heart among Englishmen," but insisted that "the struggle must for the moment be transferred to a change of heart among the Hindus and Mussalmans...[since] before they dare think of freedom they must be brave enough to love one another, to tolerate one another's religion, even prejudices and superstitions and to trust one another."[193]

Gandhi spent early 1925 touring the entire country. Crowds gathered to get a glimpse of him, a public figure of much renown and legend, but remained largely indifferent to his appeals to promote elements of his constructive program in their

---

[191] CW 25:120-1
[192] CW 25:121-4
[193] CW 25:217

respective villages. Decrying the extremely limited agenda (formal political sovereignty) that most nationalists subscribed to, in Young India, on January 29, 1925, he warned politicians, "real swaraj will come not by the acquisition of authority by a few but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused" and, therefore, "swaraj is to be attained by educating the masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority."[194] He again stressed the vital necessity of participating in the constructive program as a "non-violent struggle necessarily involves construction on a mass scale... a quickening of the national life" that, because not "spectacular enough" to generate sensational appeal and widespread publicity, "requires all the heroic patience, silent and sustained effort and self-effacement of which the tallest...is capable."[195] In Young India, on February 19, 1925, he reminded volunteer workers, "Ample work awaits those patriotic young men who do not mind the village life and who can derive pleasure from silent and sustained labour, not too taxing and yet taxing enough for its monotony."[196] This nondescript and tedious work was what would ultimately ensure India's attainment of true independence that went beyond formal political sovereignty.

In a public meeting at Madras on March 7, 1925, Gandhi insisted "no reform from without can avail without reform from within...[and] every effort that might be made in the Legislative Councils...will be perfectly fruitless" without popular participation in the constructive program.[197] True independence would necessarily be "the natural and inevitable result of businesslike habits...of co-operation among our own ranks, of

---

[194] CW 26:52
[195] CW 26:140-1
[196] CW 26:168
[197] CW 26:243

exacting discipline and obedience, and of sustained energy and willing, well-meant, calculated sacrifice...of co-operative industry on the part of the whole nation...of an enlightened awakening amongst the masses of India."[198] He turned to educated Indians saying, "you who have attained a degree of political consciousness...spread yourselves out amongst the masses and go back to the villages."[199] Acknowledging that "civil disobedience...is the real test of our strength," he maintained that "disobedience to be civil implies discipline, thought, care, attention" all virtues that could be best cultivated through the faithful prosecution of the constructive program.[200] Continuing to promote direct mass participation in the constructive program, Gandhi maintained that "no amount of argumentative powers" could prepare Indians for the "exacting responsibility of citizenship" which necessitate "the primary capacity for self-defence...[that] cannot be acquired by learning the art of debating" but by direct engagement in public service.[201]

In a speech at the office of The Hindu (a modern English-language paper styled after The Times of London) in Madras, on March 22, 1925, Gandhi acknowledged that journalism had "a distinct place in familiarizing and expressing public opinion."[202] He observed that there was "a new class of readers rapidly rising in India which requires a different character of thought, a different character of deed, and perhaps even a different character of news" and that journalism had to cater to the new Indian citizens that were being created through participation in the nationalist movement.[203] Gandhi informed

---

[198] CW 26:244
[199] CW 26:244
[200] CW 26:246
[201] CW 26:284
[202] CW 26:370
[203] CW 26:370

them also of his discovery, in his travels throughout the subcontinent, of a "definite, conscious longing on the part of the masses for something better for...India, for something better for themselves" and that journalists would "have to strike a different path and a different line also" if they were to keep in touch with this great change among the Indian masses.[204]

In Young India, on April 16, 1925, Gandhi identified some of the non-tangible benefits of the constructive program, especially of the promotion of hand-made textiles. He affirmed that he was "interested in producing the spinning atmosphere" and not just the manufacture of hand-made textiles.[205] He explained that when "many people do a particular thing, it produces a subtle unperceivable effect which pervades the surroundings and which proves infectious," and in the particular "atmosphere" produced by mass hand-spinning and hand-weaving "idle hands...will be irresistibly drawn to the wheel" and create a subtle but radical transformation of consciousness, attitude, and conduct in India's masses.[206] Insisting that the constructive program was more potent and vital to the freedom movement than satyagraha, he noted that, in any case, "there are not enough workers for organizing such a struggle...[for] closer touch with the masses...greater, warmer and continuous service of, and identification with the masses than we have yet felt desirous of."[207]

In mid-1925, while in Bengal, Gandhi called upon Congressmen to reorient their party towards a wholehearted implementation of the constructive program. This was a

---

[204] CW 26:371
[205] CW 26:515
[206] CW 26:515
[207] CW 26:537

call for an even more radical reinvention of the Congress than the one he managed to initiate in 1920—the expansion and diversification of its membership to reflect, more comprehensively, the enormous diversity of Indians. Ever the mediator between warring factions of the Congress, the Congress and other political parties, and the nationalists and the British, he sought to get the deeply divided Congress to accept both "the political programme" (participation in local self-government under the provisions of the 1919 Constitution) and the "constructive programme" (of social reform and grassroots development) as "useful and necessary" although the distinction between politics and the constructive program was one he was usually loath to make. Speaking at the Bengal Provincial Conference on May 3, 1925, Gandhi urged Congressmen to find a way to work out the differences among their "diverse elements" and find a way out of their "provincialism...through non-violent and truthful means" as they were "sitting on a mine which is likely to explode at any moment."[208] He urged readers of Young India, on July 9, 1925, to get involved in "village reconstruction, and if and when necessary, civil disobedience."[209]

In late 1925, Gandhi continued his nation-wide tour, addressing numerous meetings and formal conferences, stressing the importance of constructive work and the education of the people to a new sense of citizenship and encouraging them to greater civic participation.[210] In Young India, on August 20, 1925, he assured educated Indians that he did not "wish violently to wrest the Congress from educated India" but wanted

[208] CW 27:30
[209] CW 27:352
[210] CW Prefaces: 121

them to "grow to the new thought...to evolve an intensive active programme out of a 'harmless toy' like the spinning-wheel."[211]

In The Bombay Chronicle on September 3, 1925, he once again "prescribed" his "remedy" which was to "Spin, spin, spin, till stagnation vanishes" and insisted that his remedy should "hold the field till another or an alternative remedy is suggested and a case made out for it."[212] It was only through the propagation of the hand-made textile industry, he insisted, that it would be possible to "unite and vitalize the whole nation [in] a common industry which all can carry on entirely by themselves."[213] Further, Gandhi pointed out, "absorption in common constructive work can keep down the violence of the explosion" among the different warring communities, parties, and factions and would "further cement the union when it comes."[214] Through the columns of Young India, on November 19, 1925, Gandhi admonished Congressmen for their "hunt for offices and an unhealthy competition to capture the Congress" urging them to ensure that the Congress became "an institution for hard, honest and selfless toil."[215]

Retreat and Reflection

Exhausted by his nation-wide tour, Gandhi decided to spend one year away from public engagements and devote his attention to the affairs of his ashram that he had neglected for so long. During that year, he worked on his autobiography but continued to communicate with volunteer workers and Congressmen through editorials in Navajivan and Young India as well as through personal correspondence. He reassured readers of

---

[211] CW 28:87
[212] CW 28:153
[213] CW 28:154
[214] CW 28:154
[215] CW 28:464

Young India, on February 25, 1926 "I have not given up politics in my sense of the term...[and] never was a politician in any other sense," explaining that his politics were concerned with "internal growth" rather than conventional politicking.[216]

In a message published in the Hindustani, on March 12, 1926, he recommended spinning as a way to cope with the "distresses, dissensions, and defeats and consequent dejection" caused by engagement in the formal political arena as it gave him "peace...[and] joy in the thought that through it I establish an indissoluble bond between the lowliest in the land and myself...adding something to the desirable wealth of the country...and inviting the poorest in the land to labour for their living rather than beg for it."[217] He observed that, of all the political initiatives and programs so far, only the spinning wheel stood "above all discord and differences" and, therefore, should be promoted as "the common property of every Indian."[218]

In Young India, on April 1, 1926, he declared once again "You will achieve real freedom only by effort from within, i.e., by self-purification and self-help...[while] Civil disobedience will be no doubt there in the background."[219] One site in which efforts at self-purification and self-help could be undertaken would be wholehearted propagation of the hand-made textile industry that

> would spell the creation of so much fresh industry, the organization of [millions] into a joint co-operative effort, the conservation and utilization of the energy of the millions and the dedication of [millions] of lives to the service of the

---

[216] CW 30:48-9
[217] CW 30:105-6
[218] CW 30:105-6
[219] CW 30:206

motherland...[and] acquiring a thorough mastery of the details and innumerable knotty problems which it presents.[220]

Commenting on the inherent futility of the "constitutional" process of petitioning the British Government for "reforms" and concessions, he declared to Indian nationalists "You cannot overreach the British by the glibness of your tongue or the power of your pen" and cautioned them that the British had "grown quite accustomed to" their threats and dwarfed their "physical prowess."[221] However, with the cultivation of discipline in themselves, within their ranks, and in all their undertakings, the nationalists would be able to gain independence for India as the British "understand and respect patience, perseverance, determination and capacity for organization."[222] He urged volunteers to appreciate the fact that "all those who raise the moral tone of the community as a whole, all those who find occupation for the idle millions, are the real builders of swaraj."[223] He criticized career politicians for "rest[ing] content with a lofty ideal" but being "slow or lazy in its practice."[224] He warned that India would not get true freedom merely by shaking off the British yoke, stating "we are wrapped in deep darkness, as is evident from our paupers...our cattle" whose appalling condition was "eloquent of our irreligion rather than of religion."[225] Those desiring to lead the struggle for true freedom, therefore, would "have to discard ease and comfort, not to speak of luxuries" and lead the people in

---

[220] CW 30:452-3
[221] CW 30:453
[222] CW 30:453
[223] CW 31:411
[224] CW 32:16
[225] CW 32:16

a program of cleansing and discipline that began with the self and moved gradually outward into the public realm.[226]

In a public meeting on January 5, 1927, Gandhi reminded the people that not all of them could "enter Councils and the Legislative Assembly" or be "entitled to elect members to these legislative bodies."[227] However, he stated, "every villager, man, woman and child, Hindu and Mussalman...[could] uplift the whole of India" by participating in the hand-made textile program.[228] He urged Indians to demand "from the British people and the world at large not mercy but justice that is your due" and reminded them that that "justice will come when it is deserved by your being and feeling strong."[229] Thus, Gandhi continued, true independence would not come by getting anyone to concede a charter of demands or by drawing up a constitution but "the content of swaraj will grow with the growth of national consciousness and aspirations...[and] will be determined by...the means you adopt to achieve the goal."[230] Accordingly, nationalist leaders and volunteer workers were asked to undertake an "exploration...in the direction of determining not the definition of an indefinable term like swaraj but in discovering the ways and means" to achieve it.[231]

Taking the Constructive Program to the People

In1927, Gandhi embarked on a new tour of North India that seriously undermined his health. The main item on his agenda during this tour was the promotion of his hand-

---

[226] CW 32:400
[227] CW 32:508
[228] CW 32:508-9
[229] CW 32:552
[230] CW 32:553
[231] CW 32:553

made textile program and he appears to have abandoned all interest in the formal politicking that most Congressmen were engrossed in. He criticized the "paper schemes...for village organization" put forward by people who had "not tried the schemes...not got the resources, or the time or the inclination; but...think that any idea that occurs to them they are in duty bound to put before the country, however ill-digested or impracticable it might be" and, instead, suggested the wholehearted implementation of the hand-made textile program.[232]

He declared that a true "nation-building programme can leave no part of the nation untouched" and that would-be leaders would "have to react upon the dumb millions...[and] learn to think not in terms of a province, or a town, or a class, or a caste, but in terms of a continent and of the millions who include untouchables, drunkards, hooligans and even prostitutes."[233] He rejected the "constitutional" approach to gaining freedom—petitioning the Imperial Government for concessions—observing that all the nationalist movement could expect to get thereby "in the shape of reforms is an increased agent's share in the bureaucratic Government...an increasing share in the exploitation of the dumb millions."[234] Instead, he told nationalists, "present a united front and demonstrate to the world your capacity for regulating your own manners."[235]

He continued to promote the hand-made textile industry as the ideal enterprise within which diverse nationalists could achieve unity of purpose and cohesion, claiming that it was "an emblem of self-assertion, self-reliance and determination to abolish

---

[232] CW 33:151
[233] CW 33:461
[234] CW 34:4
[235] CW 34:4

artificial distinctions between rich and poor, between capital and labour, and establish a living bond between the two."[236] To promote this enterprise and the other elements of the constructive program, Gandhi appealed to volunteer workers to work for

> the zealous education of the people...not merely by means of speeches, but through silent social service rendered without the slightest expectation of reward...but on the contrary, with every expectation of receiving the execration and worse of a public enraged over any attempt to make it give up its superstitions or insanitary habits."[237]

On September 14, 1927, Gandhi urged municipal councilors in South India to "understand the responsibility attached to the[ir] office" and not use their positions of power "as stepping-stones to fame or renown."[238] Rather than waste their time, effort, and resources "in mutual recriminations and wranglings," each should consider himself a "trustee and custodian of public health and public morals."[239]

In late 1927, Gandhi's tour extended to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and, then, eastern India, mirroring his determination to make all of India (which, in 1927, included Ceylon and Burma, now Myanmar) his political arena. At this time, differences in opinion over what constituted proper political goals and the means to achieve them sharpened between Gandhi and prominent Congressmen, including Jawaharlal Nehru, one of his closest friends. The Simon Commission sent by the British Government to explore the still restive political situation, negotiate with nationalist leaders, and suggest further

---

[236] CW 34:79
[237] CW 34:217
[238] CW 34:535
[239] CW 34:535

"reforms," however, necessitated the maintenance of at least a semblance of cohesion among the various factions of the Congress.

In a speech at Nagercoil, on October 8, 1927 Gandhi laid down a protocol for the prosecution of satyagraha (whether in the form of non-cooperation or civil disobedience), emphasizing its essential nature as a measure of last resort and decrying its dishonest or casual use,

> Since satyagraha is one of the most powerful methods of direct action, a satyagrahi exhausts all other means before he resorts to satyagraha. He will therefore constantly and continually approach the constituted authority, he will appeal to public opinion, educate public opinion, state his case calmly and coolly before everybody who wants to listen to him, and only after he has exhausted all these avenues will he resort to satyagraha. But when he has found the impelling call of the inner voice within him and launches out upon satyagraha he has burnt his boats and there is no receding.[240]

Again, in a speech at Trivandrum on October 10, 1927, Gandhi insisted that, "satyagraha...comes not at the beginning but at the fag-end" of any struggle for justice and "presupposes immense discipline...great self-restraint...charity, and...seeks not to coerce but to convert."[241] Such a circumscription of the application and scope of satyagraha (the negative aspect of Gandhi's project) necessarily implied that the bulk of a public worker's efforts should be directed toward the implementation of the various

[240] CW 35:100
[241] CW 35:104

elements of the constructive program—the positive aspect of the effort to gain true freedom.

In a speech to the Ceylon National Congress at Colombo, on November 22, 1927, Gandhi acknowledged that the Indian National Congress had a long way to go in its journey towards political maturity and integrity, and still exhibited "bickerings and a desire more for power than for service, a desire more for self-aggrandizement than for self-effacement."[242] He advised all those advancing "the claims for self-expression and self-government" wherever they may be that "self-sacrifice, self-effacement, and self-suppression are really absolutely necessary and indispensable" in achieving their goals.[243] He observed that, while it was "a pleasurable pastime...to strive against the powers that be, and to wrestle with the government of the day, especially when that government happens to be a foreign government...self-expression and self-government are not things which may be either taken...by anybody or which can be given...by anybody," but had to be acquired through one's own efforts, since "self-government which does not require that continuous striving to attain it and to sustain it is not worth the name."[244] Finally, he complained that all over the subcontinent it seemed that "politics had degenerated into a sort of game for leisure hours, whereas...politics should be a wholetime occupation, it should engross the attention of some of the ablest men of the country."[245]

In Young India, on January 5, 1928, addressing English-literate Congressmen, Gandhi observed that the Congress "stultifies itself by repeating year after year

---

[242] CW 35:294
[243] CW 35:294
[244] CW 35:294
[245] CW 35:297

resolutions...when it knows that it is not capable of carrying them into effect...makes an exhibition of its impotence, becomes the laughing-stock of critics and invites the contempt of the adversary."[246] He insisted that any resolution must be accompanied by "a working plan" for its implementation if "the Congress is to retain its prestige and usefulness."[247] In Navajivan, on January 29, 1928, addressing Gujarati-literate volunteer workers, Gandhi declared, "Selfless and fearless workers...whatever their number, would keep on doing their duties silently, their number would multiply."[248] He insisted that if volunteers worked without regard to the opinions and actions of others "many other people...will join hands" and an "all-India organization" would not be necessary.[249]

Gandhi spent the first half of 1928 at his ashram. Followers and other members of the Congress were frustrated by his decision to refrain from involvement in the campaign to boycott the Simon Commission, but he wanted to avoid bringing the masses into the movement as he did not think they were fit for mass action at that moment and might resort to violence, as they had in 1922.

In Young India, on February 23, 1928, Gandhi assured volunteer workers and nationalists that although India had not yet obtained "statutory swaraj" all was not lost since "the freedom that politically-minded India gave itself and the unity that seemed to exist among the various communities amounted to substantial swaraj."[250] He maintained that the Non-Cooperation Movement had not "been lived in vain" because it had seen a "mass awakening" among the people who would undoubtedly "show their strength"

---

[246] CW 35:438
[247] CW 35:438-9
[248] CW 35:510
[249] CW 35:511
[250] CW 36:46

sooner or later.[251] However, he faulted the nationalist leadership, especially those involved in local self-government bodies, for playing at power games that had, in turn, "given rise to indiscipline in almost all of the national organizations."[252] He observed that the Congress, "a newly-formed organization intended to be the largest of its kind in the world...requires the vigilant, intelligent and honest watch not of one worker but of thousands...imposing on themselves the hardest discipline of which they may be capable."[253]

In Young India, on June 28, 1928, Gandhi again called for greater attention to internal discipline and reform among Indians declaring, "many of our social evils impede the march towards swaraj" and maintaining that "to postpone social reform till after the attainment of swaraj is not to know the meaning of swaraj."[254] He reiterated his belief that, with the attainment of true freedom, India would "not need many learned men with a knowledge of English or capable of delivering speeches but...workers who love the people and know their language, who understand their needs, who are truthful, dutiful, industrious, poor, fearless and indifferent to honours."[255]

During the second half of 1928, Gandhi gradually resumed engagement in formal politics that he had withdrawn from in 1926. He initiated the Bardoli satyagraha campaign in which peasants successfully withheld land revenue following a disastrous drought. He then advised the satyagrahis to not "sleep over their well deserved victory" but to "consolidate their position...[and] to proceed with constructive work with

---

[251] CW 36:105
[252] CW 36:291
[253] CW 36:292
[254] CW 36:470
[255] CW 37:63

redoubled vigour."[256] He explained that their continued empowerment lay in their "ability and willingness to handle this difficult, slow and unpretentious work of construction" and in shedding "many social abuses."[257]

In a speech at Bardoli on August 12, 1928, he declared "Driving out the English will not by itself establish swaraj in India…[but only] swaraj of barbarism, freedom to live like pigs in a pigsty without let or hindrance from anybody."[258] The attainment of true swaraj required Indians to "first learn the lesson of discipline, of rendering implicit obedience to the orders of the chief, of taking up the meanest task that might be entrusted to them with cheerfulness, alacrity and zeal."[259] Gandhi reiterated that the quest for true freedom is "a stupendous task and requires all the volunteers" available.[260] Maintaining that, "social reform is a tougher business than political reform," Gandhi observed that "people have little interest in social reform, the result of agitation does not appear to be striking, and there is little room for congratulations."[261] With such a discouraging scenario at hand, he advised "social reformers…to plod on for some time, hold themselves in peace, and be satisfied with apparently small results" because national regeneration was indeed a tedious and gradual enterprise.[262]

Late 1928 and early 1929 were marked by widespread protest against the Simon Commission. Gandhi continued to refuse to take an active part in this unrest. Not surprisingly, the Congress leadership was even less hospitable to him and his suggestions

---

[256] CW 37:146
[257] CW 37:146
[258] CW 37:165
[259] CW 37:169
[260] CW 37:169
[261] CW 37:204
[262] CW 37:204

and relations with even his close friends in the Congress grew strained. In an interview given to The Civil and Military Gazette on November 1, 1928, Gandhi asserted "I could still lead India...[but] only...when there is a national call...when I am certain of my power over the masses...numerous enough to pursue a policy of non-violence."[263]

Speaking to volunteer workers in his ashram at Wardha on December 20, 1928, Gandhi pointed out the "tremendous task" they confronted, declaring "you have to reach and establish a living contact with...millions of the poor that are scattered over the...villages in India...you dare not rest...[but] keep your bodies and minds pure so as to make of yourselves a fit instrument."[264] Addressing Congressmen at the Calcutta session, on December 28, 1928, Gandhi described the nationalist movement as "a struggle not only against the environments that seek to crush you but also a struggle between your own ranks" and pointed out that the latter struggle could well be "more prolonged, more exacting and even more bitter than the struggle against the environment which is outside."[265] As a nonviolent means of prosecuting this struggle, Gandhi urged Congressmen to "give themselves night in, night out and day in and day out to work out the constructive part of the programme."[266]

At the same session, Gandhi remarked on the dismal picture the current political scene presented "when we cannot trust our brothers and sisters, our parents, and party leaders, when we cannot trust anybody, when we have no sense of honour, when we cannot allow our words to remain unaltered for 24 hours" and remarked that, at such a

---

[263] CW 38:5
[264] CW 38:255
[265] CW 38:284
[266] CW 38:293

time, it is impossible to "talk of independence."[267] Gandhi criticized the corruption and insincerity that had entered the Congress since it participated in the local self-government program, stating, "you are forging your own shackles, from which there will be no escape because it is of your own will."[268] He urged Congressmen to take up "village reconstruction work" which was really "the organization of the peasantry and workers upon an economic basis" and promoted it as the best way "to enter into their hearts" and to "identify...completely with the masses."[269]

In Young India, on January 10, 1929, he pointed out to volunteer workers and Congressmen that the seeming "tameness" of the program of social reconstruction belied the fact that it was "the battery for storing the necessary strength for internal and national political effort."[270] He invited Congressmen to refashion their party into "the power-house from which all the power for all the work is to be derived" and warned that if "the power-house is rotten, the whole national work must be necessarily so."[271] In Navajivan, on January 13, 1929, he complained to volunteer workers and Congressmen "your capacity to observe rules is small...simplicity is comparatively little...devotion is almost insignificant, and...determination and concentration show themselves only in the beginning."[272] He claimed that the constructive program was "so catholic as to satisfy all tastes and to occupy the whole nation" if it were promoted and implemented with wholeheartedness and sincerity.[273]

---

[267] CW 38:310
[268] CW 38:310
[269] CW 38:311
[270] CW 38:326
[271] CW 38:326-7
[272] CW 38:344
[273] CW 38:355

The Return to "Politics"

In mid-1929, Gandhi relented and decided to organize a mass boycott of foreign goods, especially textiles. He drew up a detailed program for this boycott and invited participation from all sections of society. He also undertook an extensive tour of eastern India during this time. As a prerequisite for the resumption of satyagraha, Gandhi asked prospective participants to prepare themselves for activism by first purifying themselves through the sincere adoption of swadeshi and nonviolence. He also insisted that volunteer workers and Congressmen engage in a certain amount of constructive work, besides their involvement in the satyagraha, to "ensure the organization of popular bodies big and small" and to train themselves mentally and practically for concerted, disciplined, and nonviolent activism.[274]

In Young India, on April 25, 1929, Gandhi again explained that constructive work would help "promote cohesion among workers and create an indissoluble bond between them and the people—a bond necessary for the final overthrow of the existing system of government."[275] Sincere implementation of the constructive program was also an indispensable way of "fighting colossal national prejudices and habits that [had] become second nature" among the impoverished and brutalized masses.[276] Decrying the corruption and incompetence that marked the new local bodies, he observed that there was "too much wrangling, too much jealousy, too much wire-pulling and too much self-seeking in these bodies to enable honest workers to hold out for long" and unfortunately

[274] CW 40:271
[275] CW 40:283-4
[276] CW 40:284

also led to the "sacrifice of constructive work."[277] He accused Congressmen of not caring "so much for constructive work as for excitement and work that bring them into prominence without costing them much labour, if any at all."[278]

In late 1929, Gandhi mediated in an industrial dispute in the textile industry in Ahmedabad in another of his "experiments" aimed at exploring how far the principle of nonviolence could be applied in the civic arena—in this case, industrial relations. A little later, he left on a tour of North-Central India to popularize the small-scale hand-made textile industry as the main platform for nationwide grassroots socio-economic regeneration.

In Navajivan, on June 16, 1929, Gandhi declared that any "army for swaraj...must go beyond the speech-making stage to the action stage," and volunteer workers should count among their best accomplishments

> an account ...of how many lavatories they cleaned, and how many wells in how many villages, how many bunds [earthen dams] they built, how many patients they attended on, how much khadi [handmade textiles] they wove, how many wells or tanks they dug, how many night-schools they conducted and so on."[279]

He explained that "the hypnotic spell...[of] British rule" was accomplished through its "organization more than its military strength...[an] organization to which the people were made by very subtle methods to respond."[280] He advised that the best resistance to this "spell" could come from "a perfected Congress organization"[281] that would "show

---

[277] CW 40:361
[278] CW 40:390-1
[279] CW 41:51-2
[280] CW 41:537
[281] CW 41:537

striking results in constructive effort and broadest toleration towards those holding opposite views."[282]

In late 1929 and early 1930, Gandhi resumed an active role in formal politics when he backed Nehru and other Congress leaders in a demand for "complete independence" although he had opposed this demand on more than one occasion in the past. On October 31, 1929, the British Government declared its intention to call a "Round Table Conference" in London to hammer out a new constitution that would be more widely acceptable than that of 1919. However, incidents of mob violence and terrorism continued to increase all over the subcontinent during this time, owing to shortages of necessities after the war and the stagnant political situation, and were a matter of concern even to the Congress. It was the desire to channel this growing violence and unrest into nonviolent and constructive activities that led Gandhi to consider re-entering formal politics and launching a new satyagraha in spite of his conviction that the people were not yet disciplined and organized enough for it.

In the Hindi edition of Navajivan, on October 17, 1929, Gandhi told volunteers their "ideals are pure, [and] they are not lacking in love...[but] the energy which should spring from idealism and love is missing for want of training...[and] organizing capacity."[283] He drew up a list of the abilities and qualities the ideal volunteer worker should possess and suggested that "every province should have volunteer training centers as also textbooks" to impart this training and the cultivation of these qualities.[284] In Young India, on November 7, 1929, Gandhi recommended that students "reconstruct

[282] CW 41:539
[283] CW 42:9
[284] CW 42:9

their life and pass every day of their vacation in the villages surrounding their colleges or high schools...[ultimately] settling down in villages" where they could truly participate in the regeneration of the nation and "find an unlimited scope for service, research and true knowledge."[285] He criticized some impractical reform and development agendas (patterned on Western models and requiring huge outlays of capital and sophisticated expertise) that were being put forward by various individuals and organizations (often through letters to his newspapers) as alternatives to his constructive program, noting that it was "perfectly useless to suggest remedies which are beyond the means of the people."[286] He pointed out that, "in a programme of village reconstruction one has to think of this vast, helpless, ignorant and hopeless majority."[287]

Gandhi addressed Congressmen at the Lahore session, on December 31, 1929, advising them that they were not yet prepared for the "parallel government" they were attempting to form through participation in local bodies.[288] Reminding them that the average villager was "not even familiar with the name of the Congress," he suggested, instead, that Congressmen "should work in the villages—should educate the villagers."[289] Moreover, if and when the need for satyagraha arose, they "must observe the strictest discipline...see that no passion arises...no ugly demonstrations" and they "must be calm, cool, collected, courageous, brave...must speak to the point, never obstruct."[290]

---

[285] CW 42:108-9
[286] CW 42:147
[287] CW 42:147
[288] CW 42:352
[289] CW 42:352
[290] CW 42:355

In Young India, on January 9, 1930, Gandhi reminded Congressmen that the Congress was "not an organization to enunciate theories, but to anticipate national wants and wishes, and forge practical sanctions for their fulfillment."[291] Moreover, he observed, while "many have refused to see any connection between the constructive programme and civil disobedience"[292] they ought to keep in mind that constructive work "throw[s] together the people and their leaders...[and] therefore is for the non-violent army what drilling, etc. is for an army designed for bloody warfare."[293] He attacked the "ordered violence" of formal politics that concealed itself "through the declarations of good intentions, commissions, conferences and the like" and provoked "the violence of the weak which in its turn works secretly and sometimes openly."[294] The late 1920s and early 1930s were marked by hundreds of localized violent attacks by individuals and groups and resulted, inevitably, in increasingly harsh and repressive measures on the part of the Government. He reminded the readers of Young India that nonviolent satyagraha and the constructive program had to be pursued "in the midst of this double violence" of the state and of extremists.[295] However, the "greatest obstacle in the path of non-violence," according to Gandhi, were "the indigenous interests that have sprung up from British rule, the interests of monied men, speculators, scrip holders, land-holders, factory owners and the like...living on the blood of the masses, and...as callous as the British principals whose tools and agents they are."[296]

---

[291] CW 42:376
[292] CW 42:377
[293] CW 42:377
[294] CW 42:452
[295] CW 42:452
[296] CW 42:452

In Navajivan, on February 9, 1930, Gandhi urged volunteer workers to "arrange a programme of work according to their capacity so that, men, women and children, all might participate to some extent"[297] rather than "look up for everything to the Government...an attitude...[that] crippled and disabled" the people.[298] He also urged them to "make a beginning by setting an example," doing first what they expected the common people to emulate.[299] In Young India, on February 27, 1930, Gandhi listed some of the rules that satyagrahis would have to observe "As an Individual...As a Prisoner...As a Unit...[and] In Communal Fights."[300] He insisted that his imminent arrest, when he launched his new satyagraha campaign, should not prove to be a hindrance to others' efforts as "Mass movements have, all over the world, thrown up unexpected leaders."[301] However, he warned Congressmen of the danger of "making thoughtless promises and raising false hopes which may never be realized...by the mere fact of India gaining independence" and reminded them, "Many of the reforms hoped for will require tremendous social effort."[302]

Back in the Reckoning: Civil Disobedience as Civic Duty

During the first half of 1930, Gandhi launched his famous "Salt March" at Dandi in Western India and, with it, the beginning of what came to be known as the Civil Disobedience Movement. In this satyagraha campaign, he encouraged masses of people to make their own salt at the seaside and thus avoid paying a new sales tax levied on salt.

---

[297] CW 42:464
[298] CW 42:464
[299] CW 42:464-5
[300] CW 42:491-3
[301] CW 42:498
[302] CW 42:503

Unlike the Non-Cooperation Movement (of the early 1920s) that focused on demands for civil rights and increased participation in the political process, the Civil Disobedience Movement mainly comprised demands for economic justice in matters of taxation and development efforts. In a public meeting held in preparation for the Salt March, on April 26, 1930, Gandhi stated "I will be content if people stay at home but... [I] will not tolerate their interfering in my work without fulfilling my conditions" of nonviolence and strict discipline in the public march and the breaking of the salt law.[303]

On May 5, Gandhi was arrested. The second half of 1930 Gandhi spent in correspondence with ashram workers and others from prison. In early 1931, Gandhi held negotiations with the Viceroy, Lord Irwin and they scheduled a Round Table Conference to be held in London. However, despite the promise of a Round Table Conference to discuss India's demands, sporadic mob violence and terrorist activities continued into mid-1931, which time period also saw a further straining of Hindu-Muslim relations owing to disagreements on prospective demands to be made during the forthcoming Conference. The deteriorating law and order situation led Gandhi to wonder whether the Conference would, after all, yield any advantage to the independence movement and even the stability of the subcontinent.

In Navajivan, on June 7, 1931, Gandhi pleaded for volunteer workers who would "cover seven [hundred thousand] villages" all over the subcontinent and strive to implement the various elements of the constructive program.[304] With a very frugal estimate of "one worker for every ten villages," such an enterprise would require a

---

[303] CW 43:333
[304] CW 46:336

minimum of "seventy thousand men and women volunteers to cover all the villages in the country."[305] He warned the Congress "if you are not able to provide the type of volunteers...suggested, then you will lose control of the administration or...become corrupt and there will be anarchy in the country."[306]

By September 1931, Gandhi reluctantly agreed to go to London to attend the Round Table Conference. However, he was upset over the lack of cooperation between Congress-led local governments and the British-dominated civil service in the sincere implementation of the reforms of the Constitution of 1919 in letter and spirit. He insisted that the Congress was "too weak to seize power from unwilling hands in the artificial surroundings of the Round Table Conference" and this weakness was exacerbated by "the absence of real unity between the chief actors, the communities"—that is, Hindus and Muslims on one hand and caste Hindus and untouchables on the other.[307]

Although he remained a prominent figure in the Congress owing to his personal charisma, public image, and influential friends, Gandhi was aware that more Congressmen than ever were not favorably disposed toward his agenda and methods. Yet, he cautioned Congressmen, "the capacity of the Congress to take political power has increased in exact proportion to its ability to achieve success in the constructive effort...[and] actual taking over of the Government machinery is but a shadow, an emblem...[that] could easily be a burden if it came as a gift from without, the people having made no effort to deserve it."[308] He warned them that if they did not implement

---

[305] CW 46:336-7
[306] CW 46:338
[307] CW 47:2-3
[308] CW 47:92

the constructive program earnestly, then when formal power came to them they would be "found unready" to wield it as they would be "powerless to impose reforms on an unwilling people."[309] In a speech at Ahmedabad, on August 2, 1931, he stated that he entered formal politics only when he realized "that to a certain extent...social work would be impossible without the help of political work," but insisted, "the work of social reform or self-purification...is a hundred times dearer to me than what is called purely political work."[310]

In late 1931, Gandhi did visit London to attend the second session of the Round Table Conference that, however, failed to accomplish anything worthwhile, as Gandhi expected. However, he spent his time in England trying to educate public opinion about the nature of the Indian independence movement and assured them that what he really sought was a partnership with Britain that would be mutually respectful and advantageous. In an interview in London, on October 29, 1931, published in Labour Monthly (England) and in Young India, Gandhi maintained that his constructive program had resulted in "the position of the peasants and workers being infinitely superior to what they have ever been able to have" and remarked on their "extraordinary awakening" and the improvement of "their capacity for resisting injustice and exploitation."[311]

Gandhi returned to India in December 1931 and resumed his satyagraha campaign of Civil Disobedience due to the British-controlled civil service's continued non-cooperation with the Congress-led local governments. He was promptly arrested. While in prison (all of 1932 and half of 1933), Gandhi ceased all involvement in public affairs

---

[309] CW 47:235-6
[310] CW 47:246
[311] CW 48:244

and restricted himself to reading and correspondence—a common feature of his many spells of imprisonment that was, however, deeply frustrating to his followers. In late 1932, while still in prison, Gandhi began an indefinite fast to protest against the British Government's decision to treat the Untouchables as a separate constituency in the new constitution under preparation and thereby split the Hindu population. He reiterated the need for a "solid and constructive programme contemplating an attack on all fronts" to harness the "concentrated energy of thousands of men, women, boys and girls who are actuated by the loftiest of religious motives" and stated, "I respectfully urge those who do not appreciate the purely religious character of the movement to retire from it."[312]

While in prison, Gandhi also began a campaign against untouchability to dissuade the lower castes from accepting the attractive settlement offered by the British and to get higher caste Hindus to work for the enfranchisement and mainstreaming of the lower castes. To educate public opinion on the issue of untouchability and its crucial necessity for its eradication for a united and free India, Gandhi began the publication of three weeklies: Harijan (Person of God, the euphemism Gandhi employed to refer to untouchables) in English, Harijan Sevak (Servant of the Harijan) in Hindi, and Harijanbandhu (Brother of the Harijan) in Gujarati. Initially intended to address the issue of untouchability and discuss ways and means for its elimination, the weeklies gradually became the main media through which Gandhi communicated with his far-flung supporters and Congressmen all over the subcontinent. By mid-1933, however, there was no change in the situation, with lower castes impatient for rapid enfranchisement and empowerment and indifferent to Gandhi's appeals for patience and forbearance.

---

[312] CW 51:367-8

Orthodox Hindus were also unwilling to tolerate any "reform" initiatives, whether coming from the government or Gandhi.

By mid-1933 it was also clear than many workers engaged in untouchable service were either insincere or blatantly dishonest in their efforts, and Gandhi embarked on a 21-day fast to express his anguish at this violation of one of his most dearly held causes. He was released from prison due to his precarious health; and one of the first things he did was to disband his ashram that was very dear to him. He explained that the lapses in his movement demanded this sacrifice by way of expiation and as a way to strengthen his resolve and focus his attention on the internal reform of his movement.

The Second Retreat: Self-Examination and a Return to Basics

In the last quarter of 1933, Gandhi sustained his withdrawal from public affairs to engage in introspection and the reform of his movement and his followers that had suffered much from the lack of his guidance for the year and a half he had been in prison. However, once again, the low public profile he maintained also resulted in much frustration among both followers and critics and adversely affected their perceptions as to the reliability and sincerity of Gandhi's political judgment and motives. On November 7, however, Gandhi began a tour of Central and Southern India. In Harijan, on September 16, 1933, he declared "Village workers will have to be found or made and, when once the fear of settling in villages is overcome, the response to the demand for a large number of workers will be much greater."[313] Speaking at a students' meeting in Madras, on December 20, 1933, he asked them to enter public service to "move the masses...change

[313] CW 56:1

the hearts of the masses...[as] in the end only those who are working among the masses will be the deciding factor."[314]

During the first half of 1934, Gandhi continued his tour of Southern India and then went to Bihar, recently wracked by an earthquake. In a statement to the Press on April 2, 1934, he attributed the poor support for the constructive program to the fact that "the masses have not received the full message of satyagraha owing to its adulteration in the process of transmission" and called for volunteer workers who would commit themselves to becoming "spiritual instruments" as "Spiritual messages are self-propagating."[315] To do this, they would have to be "ready for the call whenever it comes" and would have to "learn the art and the beauty of self-denial and voluntary poverty...engage themselves in nation-building activities...and generally...cultivate personal purity."[316]

In the third quarter of 1935, Gandhi extended his tour to Eastern India and then Western and Central India. A socialist faction had emerged in the Congress, under Nehru's leadership, and Gandhi disapproved of its modernist agenda, its ideological acceptance of violence, and its disregard for Indian conditions and imperatives. In doing so, he upset many influential Congressmen, including Nehru.

In a discussion with students on July 21, 1934, Gandhi insisted, "social re-ordering and the fight for political swaraj—must go hand in hand...[but] a new social order cannot be 'forced.'"[317] Declaring himself "an impatient reformer...all for

---

[314] CW 56:362
[315] CW 57:349
[316] CW 57:350
[317] CW 58:220

thorough-going, radical, social re-ordering," he maintained, however, that any reform "must be an organic growth, not a violent super-imposition."[318]

On July 29, 1934, he drafted a manifesto for the Congress in which he described "the powers of the legislatures...too small for the effort which the nation must make for the realization of its goal of complete independence" and stated that only the constructive program could render Congress' efforts "irresistible" and it could be "most effectively carried on only outside the legislature."[319]

Parting Ways: Striking Out on His Own

In the last quarter of 1934, Gandhi decided to retire from formal membership in the Congress that began preparations to contest the Provincial Elections that would be held when the new Constitution (1935) would come into effect. He concluded that the Congress would never become an organization that would satisfy itself with his project of socio-economic regeneration at the grassroots level through the implementation of the constructive program. However, he decided to set up an All-India Village Industries Association (AIVIA) in an attempt to institutionalize some of the major elements of his constructive program under the aegis of the Congress. By doing so, Gandhi hoped to avoid further rifts in the Congress over his increasingly unacceptable and polarizing political positions while, at the same time, ensuring that the Congress remained committed to pursuing at least some elements of his constructive program.

Addressing the Congress leadership on October 23, 1934, he insisted that he did not resign "in a huff" but was motivated by the strong feeling that the Congress was

---

[318] CW 58:220
[319] CW 58:257

being "suppressed by [his] presence" and was finding it difficult to give "natural expression to its views" as a result.[320] He stated that he felt that he had "lost the power to persuade" Congressmen and had "become helpless" and "lost his strength" as a result, but assured them that he would remain "a humble servant of the Congress."[321] In a statement to the Press, on October 30, 1934, he declared "I do not cease to take interest in the politics of the country or in its political future...[only] cease to be interested in the details of the working of the Congress."[322] He would now turn his attention more devotedly than ever to the promotion of the constructive program since the basic "meaning of politics is the science of citizenship and...since the boundaries of citizenship have extended to cover continents, the science of politics includes attainment of advancement of humanity along all lines, social, moral, economic and political."[323] He warned Congressmen that if they abandoned the constructive program and "simply confine Congress activities to winning of...elections and of fruitless debates...they will soon find that I have taken with me the kernel of politics and they have kept for themselves only the outermost husk, without even the vitamins."[324]

The AIVIA was to be "entirely non-political," Gandhi insisted, dedicated to "the economic, moral and hygienic uplift of the villages of India and...open to workers drawn from all parties."[325] The only "test" of eligibility to join the AIVIA would be the pledge of "full sympathy with the [constructive] programme and readiness to help it with money

---

[320] CW 59:214
[321] CW 59:218
[322] CW 59:263
[323] CW 59:264
[324] CW 59:264
[325] CW 59:304

and action wherever possible."[326] In a speech to the Gandhi Seva Sangh (Gandhi Service Society—an independent, voluntary society dedicated to the propagation of Gandhian principles), on November 30, 1934, Gandhi urged the members to "form district organizations" and appoint an agent for each who would have to be "full-timers and whole-hoggers, with a live faith in the programme...prepared immediately to make the necessary adjustment in their daily life."[327] While certainly needing material resources to accomplish their task, they would need "more than money...men of strong faith and willing hands."[328] While there would be a central body controlling the affairs, the districts themselves would be "the working centers" while the central office would be "only a watch tower for the whole of India issuing instructions, but not a board of administration...a sort of correspondence school through which the various agents will carry on mutual exchange of thought and compare notes."[329] Thus, while Gandhi wanted to "avoid centralization of administration," he actively sought to promote "centralization of thought, ideas and scientific knowledge."[330]

For the greater part of 1935, the nationalist movement drifted aimlessly but while the Congress was plagued by several internal dissensions and problems, Gandhi continued to devote his full attention to the newly formed AIVIA. He continued to promote the constructive program as a panacea to several ills—the ignorance and inertia of the masses, the lack of direction and purpose among prospective public workers, as well as a political agenda and platform that various political parties could pursue in spite

[326] CW 59:304
[327] CW 59:304
[328] CW 59:411
[329] CW 59:412
[330] CW 59:412

of ideological and other incompatibilities. However, this prescription was not well received by many of Gandhi's critics and even some of his followers who expected him to be more involved in the proper "political sphere" and, thereby, pull the nationalist movement out of its slump. Gandhi's constructive program was increasingly perceived as being a quixotic distraction from more important pursuits in the realm of formal, constitutional politics.

In Harijan, on August 17, 1935, Gandhi acknowledged that the constructive program continued to engage no more than "a handful of earnest reformers scattered all over the country...[un]able to raise funds locally...[un]sure of the policy to be followed."[331] He admitted that, in the promotion of the program, the "slightest error of judgment, a hasty action or a hasty word may put back the hands of the clock of progress," and advised volunteer workers that their policies and practices would have to be "cautiously evolved in the light of experience daily gained."[332]

The Government of India Act, formulated entirely in Westminster, was passed in July 1935 and gave Indians a new Constitution with the promise of provincial autonomy—an advance over the local self-government provided by the Constitution of 1919. While the Congress and the Muslim League seemed satisfied with the provisions of the Act, at least for the moment, Gandhi refused to comment on it and continued to devote all his attention and energies to the constructive program. However, he did occasionally consult with Congressmen to answer questions and clarify issues, while the

[331] CW 61:337
[332] CW 61:337

Muslim League found in these actions further backing for their claim that Gandhi was partial to the Congress (and, therefore, to Hindus).

Addressing volunteers in Harijanbandhu, on October 27, 1935, Gandhi urged them to work the constructive program out of more than "a sense of loyalty to superior[s]" and from a position of "sincerity and knowledge," to ensure that there could be "hope for any enlightenment or of any new discoveries resulting from their work."[333] He reminded them that they were working among a brutalized populace that "have lost all hope...[and] suspect that every stranger's hand is at their throats...only to exploit them."[334] To reach such a miserable constituency, volunteer workers would have to "establish a personal touch...befriend them, know their wants and help them, progressively to improve their...condition...a good enough programme for the most ambitious worker."[335] He noted that the "question ultimately" was whether there were "workers enough of the requisite purity, self-sacrifice, industry and intelligence" for this stupendous task.[336] In a village workers' meeting on February 22, 1936, he requested volunteers to "leave politics alone...leave village factions alone...go and settle there determined to do without most of the things of a city...be incorruptible and stand like a rock against the inroad of temptations and save the village from them."[337] He insisted, "Even one pure soul can save a whole village."[338]

---

[333] CW 62:70
[334] CW 62:133
[335] CW 62:149
[336] CW 62:149
[337] CW 62:203
[338] CW 62:203

On March 3, 1936, speaking at a meeting of the Gandhi Seva Sangh (Gandhi Service Society, GSS), Gandhi maintained that he had "conceived no such thing as Gandhism" and he was not an "exponent of any sect" nor had he "codified" his thought.[339] He declared, "Without any elaborate scheme I have simply tried in my own way to apply the eternal principles of truth and non-violence to...daily life and problems...like a child...I did whatever occurred to me on the spur of the moment during the course of events." [340] He then urged his would-be followers to do likewise. He cautioned that the greatest danger to any organization, particularly a voluntary one, was "internal decay."[341] He urged volunteer workers to cultivate a "character above suspicion" and to engage in "ceaseless effort accompanied by ever-increasing knowledge of the technique of the work and a life of rigorous simplicity."[342] He warned them that "Workers without character, living far above the ordinary life of villagers, and devoid of the knowledge required of them for their work, can produce no impression on the villagers," and pointed out that the constructive program was "as much an education of the city people as of the villagers."[343]

At an AIVIA Meeting, on May 7, 1936, Gandhi pointed out that some basic hurdles had to be overcome before the Indian masses could be awakened to a responsible and empowered citizenship. He observed that the bulk of Indian villagers are "not interested in their own welfare...do not appreciate modern sanitary methods...do not want to exert themselves beyond scratching their farms or doing such labour as they are

---

[339] CW 62:223
[340] CW 62:223-4
[341] CW 62:319
[342] CW 62:319
[343] CW 62:319

used to."[344] He acknowledged that many volunteer workers were themselves "novices in village work" and advised them to "work away in steadfast faith, as their scavengers, their nurses, their servants, not as their patrons, and...forget all your prejudices and prepossessions...for a moment...even swaraj."[345]

By mid-1936, determined to stay out of constitutional debates and electioneering, Gandhi decided to found a new ashram. He settled in a small village in western India, Segaon, and invited colleagues who would be willing to "live amongst the poor and show them how to live by personal example and service rather than by preaching." He declared, in Harijan and Harijanbandhu, "I am no speaker, neither is the pen my profession...I have written...because I could not help it...it is not my business to live speak or to write...[but] to live amongst [the villagers] and show them how to live."[346]

In mid-1937, provincial elections were held with the Congress forming Provincial Governments in six of the eleven provinces. Gandhi decided to respect public opinion and support the newly formed Congress ministries. A controversy had arisen over a Congress demand for "assurances" that the British-dominated civil service would not scuttle the indigenous ministries through non-cooperation or sabotage (as it had done the local bodies in the 1920s); and Gandhi agreed to serve as mediator between the Congress and the Government in this regard. However, to workers in the GSS, this sudden condoning of formal parliamentary politics was not only confusing but also seemed a travesty of Gandhi's long-held commitment to non-cooperation with the colonial government. Their confusion and frustration was exacerbated when Gandhi wrote some

[344] CW 62:379
[345] CW 62:379
[346] CW 63:417

articles in Harijan (until then dedicated entirely to issues concerning the uplift of untouchables) on the duties and responsibilities of the new Provincial Governments.

In a GSS Meeting, on April 16, 1937, Gandhi suggested that the members "make the whole of India [their] field of activity."[347] He feared that the organization might "degenerate into a sect" and suggested that "it would be proper to cremate all my writings with my body."[348] The next day, he reminded the members that the "talk of bread is all that the people understand...[and] they have no use for politics."[349] He also advised Congressmen that "Legislatures are only for a few," but the constructive program was "for all."[350] Gandhi called for tolerance among the factions in the Congress, as well as among the various political parties that had begun preparations to contest the provincial elections, urging them "work with patriots holding views different from your own...in a spirit of co-operation and compromise."[351] He also expressed the hope that the constructive program might be promoted "with the help of Legislative Assemblies" while ensuring, of course, that the ministries do not "do wrong or...neglect their duty."[352]

Through late 1937 and early 1938, Gandhi's health deteriorated. Provincial autonomy had the unexpected (albeit understandable) effect of sparking increased and more intense popular agitations. Moreover, with its newfound power and lack of experience, the Congress began to confront new problems of indiscipline and corruption within its various ministries. Provincial autonomy also resulted, unexpectedly, in a

---

[347] CW 65:88
[348] CW 65:89
[349] CW 65:101
[350] CW 65:103
[351] CW 65:120
[352] CW 65:121

further deterioration of Hindu-Muslim relations with Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the leader of the Muslim League, instigating antagonism against Congress-dominated Provincial Governments.

In Harijan, on August 7, 1937, Gandhi dissuaded Congressmen from thinking that "ministerships are prizes for past services" and held, rather, that "ministerships are avenues to service...crowns of thorns, never of renown."[353] In Harijanbandhu, on August 8, 1937, Gandhi pleaded, "People should form organizations having regard to their vocations and special circumstances" but leave the Congress to "deal with political issues."[354] He prodded volunteer workers to undertake constructive work with "constant vigilance, effort, study and diligence" and to not "conclude that such work is dull."[355] He declared that he was "not enamoured of numbers" and would be content with "a few becoming saturated with the spirit of non-violence and disciplining themselves for the utmost suffering" rather than have a great mass of mediocre and half-hearted hangers-on.[356] He held Congress ministers to a "fourfold responsibility" explaining that, "as an individual a Minister is primarily responsible to his constituents...Collectively the Ministers are responsible to the majority of the legislators...But a Congress Minister owes his position and responsibility to his Provincial Congress Committee and the A.I.C.C. also."[357]

By mid-1938 peasant unrest, labor strikes, and communal riots spread and intensified and the Congress ministries continued to decline in ethics, competence, and

---

[353] CW 66:16
[354] CW 66:23
[355] CW 66:24
[356] CW 66:398
[357] CW 66:292

effectiveness. It was at this time that Gandhi experienced what to him was a great failure: to remain, even in his advanced age and poor health, celibate in thought and deed —he had experienced a "nocturnal emission." It had a tremendous effect on his self-confidence as he saw it as a lapse in self-control and proof that his body had not yet been disciplined enough to achieve the kind of purity he sought. This incident threw him into a deep depression and he withdrew, for a while, from all public affairs much to the frustration of his followers.

In response to the growing turmoil throughout the subcontinent, Gandhi urged the formation of "local corps" that would "not confine themselves merely to preparedness for emergencies, but for the daily walk of life in all its departments, personal, domestic, social, economic, political, religious."[358] He advised, however, that these corps "not aim, except indirectly, at influencing events happening hundreds of miles away from their scene of activity" and thus become more effective at keeping the peace during crises.[359] He cautioned them "I cannot play any active part in the formation of these corps...I have not the health, energy or time for it...I can only guide and make suggestions through correspondence or columns...those who appreciate the idea and feel they have the ability, will have to take the initiative themselves."[360]

In late 1938, Gandhi undertook a tour of the Northwest Frontier Province, bordering Afghanistan—a site of frequent and violent Hindu-Muslim clashes. Moreover, the people of the various kingdoms of non-British India (allied to British India through treaties, but otherwise autonomous) also erupted in a spate of agitations against their

---

[358] CW 67:40
[359] CW 67:40
[360] CW 67:127

respective rulers for greater civil and political rights and economic and social reforms. However, Gandhi simply continued to promote his constructive program. He maintained that he was unable to formulate an appropriate response to these issues, saying that even he was not fully aware of "the Gandhian hue" and declaring, "I am sailing on an uncharted sea and have to take frequent soundings."[361] Moreover, he insisted, under a leadership such as his, there was no room for blind following; his followers would have to develop and act on their own initiatives. He was further demoralized by the growing corruption and incompetence of the Congress ministries, and observed that he saw "nothing but anarchy and red ruin in front of the country."[362]

Back Again, But No Business As Usual

By 1939, Gandhi ended his self-imposed exile from formal politics and intensified his call for the internal purification and strengthening of the Congress ministries and the Congress Party. He defended his inattention to the civil disobedience movement and his frequent withdrawals from formal politics,

> In a satyagraha campaign the mode of fight and the choice of tactics...whether to advance or retreat, offer civil resistance or organize non-violent strength through constructive work and purely selfless humanitarian service, are determined according to the exigencies of the situation...a satyagrahi must carry out whatever plan is laid out for him with a cool determination giving way to neither excitement nor depression.[363]

---

[361] CW 68:194
[362] CW 68:321
[363] CW 69:60

At a GSS meeting, on May 5, 1939, Gandhi acknowledged that implementing the constructive program was tedious and slow to show results, but insisted, "there is no other way...[to] make satyagraha complete...[and to] create an atmosphere of non-violence" necessary for true satyagraha.[364] He maintained "without social reform, no political reforms are possible...therefore, give the first place to the work of social reform and only the second place to purely political work, if there is such a thing."[365] Remarking on the reluctance of many of his "followers" to engage in constructive work, he informed them "If I cannot carry you forward along my own lines...I am unfit to lead...Discard me or have me on my terms."[366]

The Second World War erupted in 1939 and the Congress was faced with the dilemma of whether to support or undermine the war effort. Gandhi advised the Congress to support the British war effort as the lesser of two evils. There were many Congressmen, however, who saw this path as the waste of an opportunity to pressure the British Government into granting India more concessions. Furious at the Imperial Government's enlistment of India in the war without consulting the Provincial Ministries in advance, the Congress Ministries resigned. This act was intended to shake the Imperial Government out of its complacent disregard for Indian demands and force a compromise or at least a promise of imminent reform. However, the wartime government in London decided to engage in a show of resolve at this critical moment and simply suspended all provincial governance and increased repressive measures.

---

[364] CW 69:217
[365] CW 69:225
[366] CW 69:274

Gandhi continued to defend his constructive program from the attacks of critics and followers alike, saying, "In all that has been written against the constructive programme, I have not come across a single convincing argument against...its merit."[367] He challenged the newly jobless and aimless Congressmen to call

> A conference, formal or informal, between all Congress groups...to consider the question whether time has not come to revise the policy of non-violence and the consequent constructive programme, and to find out and frame a programme in consonance with and answering the present temper of Congressmen.[368]

He urged "every Congressman to carry on a fierce search inward and deal with the central problem" of framing a long-term plan of action for national regeneration as it was "not safe or dignified for the Congress to follow the policy of drift" and remain "a house divided against itself."[369]

At a conference of Local Bodies' Representatives, on October 19, 1939, Gandhi declared that, in the constructive program, he had "placed the simplest things before the people of India...calculated to bring about revolutionary changes" but it would be of no avail unless they managed to overcome "the intoxication of the existing regime" and the false promises of modernity.[370] He asked Congressmen to consider the various factions they had split into and determine whether "they are centripetal or centrifugal...strengthen the organization or...weaken it...are not bidding for power...do not distrust one another...submit to discipline."[371] He pointed out that "divided counsels, indecision, or

---

[367] CW 70:10
[368] CW 70:11
[369] CW 70:11
[370] CW 70:275
[371] CW 70:322

half-hearted obedience to instructions" would inhibit the Congress from moving "forward in confidence and with one mind."[372] He charged the Congress with a "double function": of being "a democratic organization in peace time" and "a non-violent army in war time."[373] He assured Congressmen, "If you are able to evolve some new technique of satyagraha, I will be ready to follow you."[374] He urged them "Do not accept my leadership with a mental reservation as you will betray both me and the country" and told them that their cooperation, if extended, would have to be "full and hearty."[375] He suggested that, if they really valued his leadership in matters of national and political importance, they should "make it a point to read Harijan as if it was a weekly bulletin containing instructions for them."[376] He obviously could not rely on the disarrayed and indecisive Congressmen, to come up with an independent initiative.

Through the end of 1939, Congress repeatedly demanded that the British explicitly articulate their war aims, India's role in the war, and the reforms that India might anticipate. On March 23, 1940, the Muslim League articulated its first clear demand for the creation of a separate Muslim state that would be called "Pakistan." Observing that Indians "would not take to arms easily even though conscription may be resorted to," Gandhi stated he would rather strive to "conscript...productive labour skilled and unskilled...[as] the easiest and the most effective method of organizing society on a peaceful footing."[377]

---

[372] CW 70:323
[373] CW 70:345
[374] CW 70:376
[375] CW 70:376
[376] CW 70:389
[377] CW 71:155

Addressing the GSS again, on February 21, 1940, Gandhi scolded them, "You pretend to serve through position and power...only want to make a show of service."[378] He asked them to regard it as their "duty to forget politics...till the time comes when all the parties in the country would approach" them, imploring them to participate in politics, and only then do so.[379] He insisted "the constructive programme...alone is real politics...remain within the Congress fold, but keep yourselves away from power and elections."[380] He reminded them that the "field of constructive work is very vast" and urged them to "study it...do research and make discoveries in that field."[381] He reminded them that the various elements of the constructive program "provide a non-political meeting ground for persons representing diverse schools of political opinion" and, thus, offered the best potential of serving as a site for inter-party cooperation.[382]

In a discussion with the Congress leadership, on March 15, 1940, Gandhi declined any role in a fresh civil disobedience movement, claiming that he could not "produce a non-violent army" unless the masses had first been "disciplined by work" as it was only such followers that would not "go astray."[383] He declared, "You will not be able to make me your General on your terms."[384] Speaking to them again, a few days later, he decried the lack of "discipline in the ranks...divided up into groups which strive to gain more and more power."[385] In Harijan, on April 20, 1940, he reiterated that reform had to be

---

[378] CW 71:242
[379] CW 71:242
[380] CW 71:259
[381] CW 71:274
[382] CW 71:290
[383] CW 71:338
[384] CW 71:351
[385] CW 71:350

gradual and nonviolent if it was to be lasting and necessitated "education both of the haves and the have-nots" aimed at creating an "atmosphere of mutual respect and trust...as the preliminary step."[386]

Through 1940, Gandhi refused to give in to the demand for a new satyagraha campaign, insisting that conditions in the country and the mood of the people were far from conducive to such a movement. He stated, "Working in the midst of suspicion and terrible misrepresentation on the one hand and the prevailing lawlessness outside and inside the Congress on the other, I have to think a thousand times before embarking on civil disobedience."[387] Meanwhile, the demand for Pakistan, summarily dismissed by Gandhi and the Congress as a desperate ploy on the part of Jinnah to attract attention and gain political leverage, became more strident and widespread.

Gandhi admonished the Congress leadership, in early July 1940, for wanting "to seize power" and advised them to restrict themselves only to that power that "resides in the people" that they could claim by becoming "mere representative[s] of the...people."[388] He reminded them that power "involves emoluments, glory and things which people prize" and suggested that they "let others hold power" while they turn themselves into a "group of non-violent men wishing to convert the country to non-violence"[389] and "trying to produce a homogeneous nation," however long that might take.[390] He pointed out that the Congress' "control of the masses, over even...registered Congressmen [was] ineffective" and the Congress, at least for some time, should devote

---

[386] CW 71:425
[387] CW 72:20
[388] CW 72:235
[389] CW 72:238
[390] CW 72:239

its energies to internal reform and restructuring. Gandhi further noted that, while people (including Congressmen) were eager to participate in the "negative response" (satyagraha), in adherence to the "positive response" (constructive program) enthusiasm and sincerity were lacking.[391] He acknowledged that Congressmen and their supporters had been "successful as against the British" but had "failed against their own people" by remaining incompetent and corrupt.[392]

In Harijan, on August 4, 1940, Gandhi consolidated his prescriptions for the qualifications every satyagrahi would have to acquire if the freedom movement was to remain nonviolent and achieve success:

> The solitary satyagrahi has to examine himself. If he has universal love and if he fulfils the conditions implicit in such a state, it must find its expression in his daily conduct. He would be bound with the poorest in the village by ties of service. He would constitute himself the scavenger, the nurse, the arbitrator of disputes, and the teacher of the children of the village. Everyone, young and old, would know him; though a householder he would be leading a life of restraint; he would make no distinction between his and his neighbour's children; he would own nothing but would hold what wealth he has in trust for others, and would therefore spend out of it just sufficient for his barest needs. His needs would, as far as possible, approximate to those of the poor, he would harbour no untouchability, and would therefore inspire people of all castes and creeds to approach him with confidence.[393]

---

[391] CW 72:244
[392] CW 72:244
[393] CW 72:335

In another editorial in Harijan, a week later, he urged the necessity for satyagrahis (even if they were Congressmen) to stay away from formal politics and to play a much more important role in the freedom movement:

> It is...desirable that there should be a group of people pledged to devote their lives to proving the efficacy of non-violence. If the existence of such a group is good for the country, it is apparent that they should remain outside the Congress, and that the Congress should not only tolerate them but welcome them, render them as much help as possible, and regard them as their own. That means that far from there being any estrangement or misunderstanding between the Congress and this group, their relations should, if possible, be sweeter than before.[394]

In a discussion with members of the All-India Congress Committee, Gandhi responded to their demands for a fresh satyagraha campaign by declaring that "I am sailing on an uncharted sea...have no cut and dried programme...[and am] brooding from moment to moment."[395] He advised, "in the meanwhile follow my weekly writings and carry out the constructive programme."[396] In Harijan, shortly afterwards, he invited participation in the constructive program, urging people to contribute "their share to...make India free;" and while their efforts "may or may not bring swaraj," they would "surely have the satisfaction of having done their best."[397]

Gandhi finally relented, in the face of growing Congress inertia and frustration, and approved a Congress plan to start a civil disobedience campaign in late 1940. Many

---

[394] CW 72:352
[395] CW 72:364
[396] CW 72:364
[397] CW 72:437

Congress leaders, including Nehru, were arrested and Gandhi was forced to intensify and expand his own initiative that had been relatively modest compared to his earlier satyagrahas. Addressing the leaderless Congress workers on March 21, 1941, Gandhi reminded them of an alternative course of action they could always resort to,

> ...the widening and working of the constructive programme is the only way in which active non-violence can express itself...civil resistance is impossible without tangible co-operative work requiring exact discipline and voluntary and whole-hearted obedience to rules and regulations.[398]

By mid-1941, most important Congress leaders were in jail. However, Gandhi continued to insist that he would grant his followers "permission" to engage in satyagraha only if they could prove to him that they had spent some time working the constructive program. He was unwilling to start a large-scale agitation at this time owing to an unrelenting spread of Hindu-Muslim tension following the increasingly strident demand for Pakistan and many provocative violent acts by members of the Muslim League.

In a statement to the Press, on May 7, 1941, in connection with Hindu-Muslim riots in Bihar, Gandhi urged the Congress to "invoke the assistance of all parties [although] each may have its political programme...[to] settle all...differences through negotiation and peaceful effort."[399] He urged the revival of the hand-made textile industry to effect rural regeneration and pointed out that it would "involve a lot of statistics as also knowledge of economics, psychology, particularly of the Indian mind, and also of ethics" and would "work by changing people's sense of values and habits."[400]

---

[398] CW 73:388
[399] CW 74:37
[400] CW 74:279

Clarifying and Consolidating the Constructive Program

By late 1941, Gandhi suspended even the limited individual civil disobedience he allowed some of his followers to engage in on account of the increasing communal violence between Muslim League and Congress supporters. This exacerbated the frustration of many Congressmen, as did the unyielding emphasis that Gandhi placed on his constructive program even at this precarious stage of the freedom movement—an enterprise widely perceived as a futile distraction of attention from more pressing issues such as negotiating with Muslim League leaders to present a united front against the embattled Imperial Government and force a transfer of power. Moreover, Gandhi decided to publish a pamphlet, Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place, to lay out, in a single document, the various components of the program and how they related to one another, as well as the relationship of the program to satyagraha and to swaraj. This was a rhetorical response to the persistent demands of his followers to present a coherent outline of the constructive program that could serve as a guidebook in his absence.

In a statement to the Press, on October 28, 1941, Gandhi sadly acknowledged, "There is a marked deterioration in enthusiasm...fewer people are coming forward now than before...there is no discipline among many satyagrahis...there is no life left in the Congress."[401] In another statement to the Press, on December 7, 1941, he noted that "dismay and demoralization" had crept into the freedom movement "because Congressmen in general have not realized the inevitable connection between constructive

[401] CW 75:55-6

programme and civil disobedience."[402] He insisted that, "shorn" of the constructive program, "civil disobedience becomes a method of violence bound to prove ineffective in the end" and that the "prosecution of the constructive programme means constructing the structure of swaraj."[403] In a statement to the Press, on January 7, 1942, Gandhi advised that "there must be token civil disobedience by the fewest possible" and that the bulk of volunteers and Congressmen must engage in "ceaseless occupation in constructive programme [as] the best preparation...it means concentration in villages of the city people and their being occupied and occupying the villagers in productive and educative work."[404]

Singling out Congressmen for criticism, Gandhi claimed that, in the fifty-five years of its existence, the Congress had been "largely a debating society, offering civil disobedience at intervals and all the time only playing with its vital programme of construction."[405] He warned, "if Congress does not provide work for the workless and hungry...protect the people from depredations or teach them how to face them...help them in the face of danger, it will lose its prestige and popularity."[406] He maintained that the prevalent mood of the people was not conducive to "mass revolt" and that the "best, quickest and most efficient way is to build up from the bottom."[407] This essential work did not require "brave resolutions" but "brave, corporate, intelligent work" within the

---

[402] CW 75:137
[403] CW 75:137
[404] CW 75:202
[405] CW 75:211
[406] CW 75:211-2
[407] CW 75:212

context of the constructive program that alone constituted "common ground between the rulers and the people."[408]

The British Government had sent Sir Stafford Cripps to negotiate for Congress' cooperation in the war effort with vague promises of reforms after the war. This mission failed and led to a further deterioration in the political climate. However, dissent increased within the Congress over the issue of going along with Cripps' proposals. Moreover, Jinnah's Muslim League now clearly "stood in isolation from and indeed in opposition to the national freedom movement."

Framing a Draft Resolution for the All-India Congress Committee, on April 24, 1942, Gandhi declared, "Whether the British remain or not, the Congress has a duty always to wipe out unemployment, to bridge the gulf between rich and poor, to banish communal strife, to exorcise the demon of untouchability...[and if it] did not take a living interest in this nation-building work, freedom must remain a dream and unattainable by either non-violence or violence."[409] In Harijan, on May 31, 1942, he advised volunteer workers and Congressmen, "In trying to educate the people to be without the British or any power, the chief thing is to train them to resist all injustice, no matter how or by whom it is perpetrated."[410]

In a conversation with members of the Rashtriya Yuvak Sangh (National Youth Organization), on May 28, 1942, Gandhi urged, "become tough labourers...impervious to day and night, heat and cold...cultivate resistance...develop your intellect and will-

---

[408] CW 75:212
[409] CW 76:65
[410] CW 76:133

power."[411] He stated, "As long as I can write I will go on explaining...[since] neither the people nor the government realize the full implications of my plan."[412] He acknowledged that his "imperfect language" was "but a poor and an imperfect vehicle" for his thoughts but that they should "ponder over" his writings carefully.[413]

Gandhi urged volunteer workers and Congressmen to ensure that institutions affiliated to the constructive program, such as the AIVIA, although the "creations of the Congress, are wholly autonomous and unconnected with Congress or other politics" and should remain so.[414] He reminded them that the missions of these organizations were "humanitarian, social, educational, economic or all combined" and that their work was "wholly constructive and creative" and that, therefore, they must not "lose this non-political character of theirs, if they are to retain their prestige, usefulness, and efficiency."[415]

In an interview to foreign correspondents on July 15, 1942, Gandhi declared, "My influence, great as it may appear to outsiders, is strictly limited...I have considerable influence to conduct a campaign for redress of popular grievances because people are ready and need a helper...[but] I have no influence to direct people's energy in a channel in which they have no interest."[416] However, he shortly announced yet another satyagraha campaign, famous as the "Quit India Movement." In instructions to civil resisters in Bombay, on August 4, 1942, mindful of the possibility of his arrest at any

---

[411] CW 76:158
[412] CW 76:159
[413] CW 76:160-1
[414] CW 76:278
[415] CW 76:278
[416] CW 76:300

time, Gandhi reminded them, "Each of you is his own leader and a servant of the whole nation...every Indian, who desires the freedom for the whole of India and fully believes in the weapon of truth and non-violence for the purpose of this struggle, will regard himself as a Congressman and act as such."[417] In a speech to the Congress leadership, on August 8, 1942, he similarly urged, "learn not to lose courage even when you are in a hopeless minority and are laughed at...hold on to your beliefs in the confidence that you are in the right."[418] On August 9, the British Indian Government arrested all the top Congress leaders, as well as Gandhi.

Groping in the Dark

From the last quarter of 1942 up to mid-1944, Gandhi remained in prison. During this time, his wife died and the political situation grew even more stagnant as far as Congress activity was concerned, with the entire senior leadership imprisoned. The only nationalists who were active during this phase were the extremists and violent revolutionaries, some affiliated to the various Socialist and Communist parties, and some acting alone.

On his release due to ill-health, Gandhi told Congressmen (whose leaders were still in prison), on June 29, 1944, that although they could not "see the way ahead" they should "suffer from no sense of frustration" as such frustration could "spring only from one's own weakness and loss of faith"[419] and although civil disobedience was "a very potent weapon...everyone cannot wield it" as it needed "training and inner strength...and requires occasions for its use." Instead, he suggested, "non-violent non-co-operation...be

[417] CW 76:365
[418] CW 76:384
[419] CW 77:340

practiced by everybody."[420] He apologized for not being able to offer "any further guidance," beyond the publication of Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place, as he had "no strength to get into details."[421] In a statement to the Press, on July 28, 1944, he lamented the fact that although he did "swear by the Constructive Programme," the volunteer workers had not "developed in that programme the [same] living faith."[422]

In the second half of 1944, Gandhi held talks with Jinnah, trying to come to a peaceful settlement over the prospective division of power in independent India, but failed. With the widespread "moral breakdown" that seemed to be engulfing Indian politics, and even the Congress, Gandhi found little solace even in the constructive program he had been advocating tirelessly, although he never gave it up.

Speaking to the All-India Spinning Association, on September 1, 1944, Gandhi observed that its "foundation...was so weak that the Association could be easily wiped out of existence" as it had not "taken root in the life of the people...[and] had not been organized on an imperishable basis."[423] He recommended that the various elements of the constructive program "would have to be decentralized...spread far and wide and take permanent root" for it to succeed.[424] He maintained that it was "no use merely making speeches or giving lectures" but what was needed was for workers to "make scientific experiments and declare from the house-tops the results of [their] experiments."[425] He advised volunteer workers, "Do away with mutual recriminations, disabuse your minds of

---

[420] CW 77:342
[421] CW 77:342
[422] CW 77:430
[423] CW 78:63
[424] CW 78:64
[425] CW 78:67

any reservations, iron out all the differences and thus simplify your work...repose full confidence in your representatives and be frank."[426] He asked them to assume responsibility for not having "won the confidence of Congressmen sufficiently to make them...help...in village work" and suggested that they "look at the whole thing from a new angle and a new order of priorities."[427] He observed, "Judged by your own objective you have done little, very little...you have not yet reached the seven hundred thousand villages."[428]

In a statement to constructive workers at a conference in Bombay, in late October 1944, Gandhi declared, "Just as military training is necessary for armed revolt, training in constructive effort is equally necessary for civil resistance...just as the use of arms becomes necessary only when an occasion demands it, even so is the use of civil resistance only occasional."[429] He wanted to ensure that the thousands of volunteer workers stayed away from public activism that could very well turn violent in the charged political atmosphere and recommended, as an alternative outlet, the quiet implementation of the constructive program. He urged the workers to "never be on the look-out for civil resistance...[but] hold themselves in readiness" to employ it but only if and when "the constructive effort is sought to be defeated."[430]

The major part of the Congress leadership continued to spend the first half of 1945 in prison and Gandhi, still unwell from his long imprisonment and from advanced age, was unable to fill the void in the Congress. Spreading communal and anti-British

---

[426] CW 78:67
[427] CW 78:70
[428] CW 78:71
[429] CW 78:219
[430] CW 78:219

violence, coupled with the lack of a leadership to channel energies and frustrations into constructive outlets led the British government to resort to increasingly repressive measures to maintain some semblance of law and order. Bengal suffered a terrible famine at this time, but Gandhi could not tour the region as he was not in good health and remained at the ashram he called "Sevagram" (Village of Service), throwing himself into its affairs.

In a speech at Sevagram, on February 15, 1945, Gandhi declared that modeling the implementation of his constructive program at the level of a district was "too big a bite" for him, but if he could "successfully organize work in one village...[to] serve as a model for the rest of the...villages to follow...[he] would be satisfied."[431] Speaking to the All-India Spinning Association on March 24, 1945, he reiterated that while the "Parliamentary programme may result in political swaraj...non-violent swaraj is possible only by fully implementing the constructive programme."[432] He maintained that, "Constructive work cannot make headway without a resuscitation of...initiative and originality...and the attainment of independence through truth and non-violence must remain an empty dream unless constructive work is carried through to success."[433]

By the middle of 1945, the Congress leaders were freed and a new conference of Indian leaders was summoned at Simla—the summer capital of British India.[434] The Government also suggested drawing up a plan for the industrialization of free India and arranging for Indian industrialists and entrepreneurs to visit England and America to

---

[431] CW 79:126
[432] CW 79:297
[433] CW 79:300
[434] CW Prefaces: 431

make contacts with their counterparts there. Gandhi, however, strongly disapproved of this idea as it ran counter to his plan for the construction of a self-sufficient, rural, agrarian economy. Instead, he advocated the setting up of ashrams to educate the masses in "institution ethics" and to teach them how to practice "the art of collective living by effacing oneself completely in dedicated service."[435] By the third quarter of 1945, however, the Indian leaders failed to arrive at a working formula to constitute a provisional National Government and so the Simla conference was a failure.[436] Gandhi, who never expected the conference to yield anything of value anyway, once more withdrew from public affairs.

While on a train to Bombay, on August 20, 1945, he wrote a pamphlet addressed to constructive workers and Congressmen. In this pamphlet, Gandhi warned them that they would never "popularize and advance the craft of the villages" if all they did was "lazily copy the Congress and set up committees."[437] Rather, constructive work needed the "enthusiastic support of all Congressmen and...of Indians throughout the land" and to do this they had to "dot India with experts of the type wanted."[438] He pointed out the need for "a central body of honest experts" as "committees or even agents can show no results unless they are experts who know their work."[439] The Congress wanted to revise its Constitution, in October 1945, and Gandhi suggested that it now "make it a point of duty to penetrate the 7,00,000 villages of India" and arrange for "at least one Congress

[435] CW Prefaces:434
[436] CW Prefaces:436
[437] CW 81:143-4
[438] CW 81:144
[439] CW 81:144

worker [to] stay in each village."[440] By working among the villagers, the Congress could "give them an idea of their duties and their rights" and begin the long and arduous task of turning the brutalized masses into a citizenry.[441]

The last quarter of 1945 remained a time of uncertainty and anxiety for the nationalist movement as well as for the colonial administration. The Bengal famine and the shortage of food and cloth owing to the war that had just ended added to the unrest throughout the subcontinent. Gandhi revised and republished Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place (first published in 1941) on the request of many of his supporters. In the foreword to this revised edition, Gandhi addressed his readers "whether workers and volunteers or not"[442] to commit themselves to the constructive program that was "as workable as any other and more so than most" as long as it could be assured pursuit with "an indomitable will on the part of earnest workers."[443] He declared that, in any case, he had "no substitute for it, if it is to be based on non-violence."[444] He reminded his readers that "pioneers" of any novel enterprise could expect to be opposed by those resistant to change and historically "had to go through the fire of suffering throughout the world," and the constructive program was no different.[445] He insisted, however, that "men composing the Government are not to be regarded as enemies" and that, while they had to "part" ways, they should do so "as friends."[446]

---

[440] CW Supp.4: 227
[441] CW Supp.4: 228
[442] CW 82:67
[443] CW 82:67
[444] CW 82:67
[445] CW 82:67
[446] CW 82:67

In a speech at a prayer meeting on December 10, 1945, he warned that, while the transfer of power was imminent, Indians now had to focus on self-discipline in order to exercise that power responsibly and effectively.[447] He reminded the audience that the British Government "was not the last hurdle to be got over."[448] In a speech to Congress workers, ten days later, he urged those who were engaged in formal politics that "even there they must make it their business to work the constructive programme" and remarked that "in any case, the bulk of the work of Congressmen will be outside legislatures and they must devote themselves whole-heartedly to the new, enlarged programme of constructive work."[449]

In the first quarter of 1946, the new Labour Government of Clement Attlee in Britain conceded that the time had come to grant independence to India and sent a Cabinet Mission to negotiate with Indian leaders. Moreover, the various political parties, most notably the Congress and the Muslim League, would also have to negotiate the formation of a Provisional Government that would oversee the drafting of a new national constitution and the holding of elections. Gandhi responded positively to this development but continued to devote most of his time and energy to reaching out to the common people and volunteer workers all over the country through his speeches at prayer meetings and in editorials. He also began a new tour of the regions most wracked by communal violence, covering Bengal and Assam in North-east India and, then, South India. In spite of the prospect of the imminent transfer of power, or perhaps because of it (and the uncertainty over what the new power structure would be like), the law and order

[447] CW 82:199
[448] CW 82:199
[449] CW 82:247

situation remained volatile. Gandhi tried to placate the masses and channel their restive mood by arranging regular public prayers that involved much hymn-singing and a short speech in which he referred to disturbing current events, such as riots, and advised the people on how to deal with them nonviolently and constructively.

Speaking at a Constructive Workers' Conference in Madras, on January 27, 1946, Gandhi described the pursuit of the "parliamentary programme" as "building from the top" and urged them to "build from below so that the foundation would be strong and the structure good...[as] any mistake...while building from the bottom...could be rectified immediately, and the harm done would not be much."[450] However, he admitted that the constructive program could not "progress much without the help of the Government...at every step."[451] In Harijan, on February 2, 1946, Gandhi urged "calmness, rigid discipline, co-operation and goodwill...[in] place of passion, indiscipline and jealousies, public and private" now that independence was imminent, warning that the "swaraj machinery" might otherwise "crack and go to pieces and your future state may very well become worse than the present, bad and insufferable as it is."[452]

Gandhi suggested that, at the very least, the Congressmen in the legislatures could "expose the Government" and thus hold it accountable to the people,[453] but they could also "prevent undesirable legislation and bring in laws which are useful for the public" as well as ensure that "as much help as possible is given to the constructive programme."[454] In a statement to the Press on February 26, 1946, Gandhi denounced the "underground

---

[450] CW 83:39
[451] CW 83:49
[452] CW 83:83
[453] CW 83:96
[454] CW 83:96

activity" of terrorists who continued to be active, maintaining that a "select few" could never "bring swaraj to the millions by secretly directing their activity."[455] He pointed out that "millions in India would not have been awakened but for the open, unarmed struggle" that he proposed through the twin enterprises of satyagraha and the constructive program.[456]

Gandhi warned a public gathering of army men on March 22, 1946, "in free India you will not be pampered...[nor] have these lavish privileges with which this foreign Government bribes you at the expense of India's poor but will have to serve India and share her destitution."[457] He called for volunteer workers who were willing to be "modern Hercules who can...take up parliamentary work, constructive work as distinguished from the parliamentary and the organization work of the Congress, in addition to working for your own livelihood."[458]

A New Dawn?

In the second quarter of 1946 negotiations were held between the Congress and the British Cabinet Delegation and the Viceroy (with Gandhi serving as mediator) to work out the modalities for the transfer of power. This period also saw Gandhi regularly reaching out to the common people through speeches at prayer meetings and editorials in his weeklies, trying in particular to defuse the communal tension that was rising with the imminent transfer of power and the Muslim League's increasingly strident demand for Pakistan. He advised volunteer workers to set up "non-violent corps" that had to be

[455] CW 83:182-3
[456] CW 83:183
[457] CW 83:303
[458] CW 83:306

"small, if they are to be efficient...scattered all over...one each for a village."[459] He recommended that members of such corps "must know one another well...[and] select a head...[but] have the same status."[460]

In Harijan, on July 14, 1946, Gandhi attempted to "point out the danger from within" that the Congress was facing and he identified it, characteristically, first and foremost in the personal realm. He accused them of "laziness of mind and body...[and] smug satisfaction that...having suffered imprisonment they have nothing more to do to win freedom and that a grateful organization should reward their service by giving them first preference in the matter of elections and offices."[461] He condemned their "unseemly and vulgar competition for gaining...prize posts."[462] He observed that Congressmen did not know "the kind of independence they want" and "recite the formula almost parrot-like" from resolutions the Congress had passed earlier.[463] Among the best of them, "their notion of independence...means Congress Raj" and the rest of them had "left further thinking to the Working Committee—a most undemocratic way."[464] This Congress Raj (rule) would be not much better than the British Raj as it would entail a mere change in personnel within the administration, rather than a revolutionary restructuring of the national edifice and the reformulation of its priorities, policies, and practices. In order that a "real revolution...be brought about," Gandhi suggested, "every reform like charity

[459] CW 84:66
[460] CW 84:66
[461] CW 84:426
[462] CW 84:426
[463] CW 84:427
[464] CW 84:427

must begin at home" and, thus, the first task facing the Congress was one of internal reform.[465]

A "caretaker government" was formed on July 4, 1946 with a mixture of representatives from the Congress and the Muslim League. However, rather than calming the masses, this development spurred rioting in Calcutta on an unprecedented scale as battle lines and boundaries of the two nations that were to emerge from the dissolution of British India were drawn. Shortages of food and clothing continued to spark widespread mass unrest. This period was also marked by labor unrest and popular uprisings in the kingdoms not under direct British rule.

In Harijan, on July 28, 1946, Gandhi insisted that, "Independence must begin at the bottom."[466] The new republic would have to be reorganized as

> ...a structure composed of innumerable villages...[in] ever-widening, never-ascending circles...not a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom...[but] an oceanic circle whose center will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units.[467]

Even though he "may be taunted with the retort that this is all Utopian" he would still have "India live for this true picture, though never realizable in its completeness."[468]

---

[465] CW 84:427
[466] CW 85:32
[467] CW 85:33
[468] CW 85:33

In a speech at a meeting of the Deccan Princes (some of independent kings affiliated to British India who would be likely to join the Indian Union) on July 28, 1946, Gandhi warned them that continuing to rule autocratically would be "only at your cost".[469] The new government of a united India would have to abandon the present system where "power is perched on Mt. Everest" from where "orders are issued and the people have to obey" and where the government "comes to the people once or twice a year...to collect revenue."[470] In Harijan, on September 8, 1946, Gandhi cautioned the new ministers "never to use British troops, no matter what their hue is, not even the police trained by them" as they had been "hitherto used not to help the people but to keep them under the foreign yoke."[471] Instead, he recommended that they "be used for constructive purposes" for which they were "specially qualified" as they were "trained and expected to bring into being canvas cities in a moment...to procure and keep clean water and make perfect sanitary arrangements."[472]

Answering questions at a meeting in New Delhi on September 23, 1946, Gandhi chided Congressmen for "seek[ing] leadership instead of being servants of the nation" and maintained that there could be "no room for wrangles when service is the ideal."[473] He urged the Indian people in general to cultivate "the ability and courage to subsist on what our soil can give us rather than depend on foreign charity...[and] foreign

[469] CW 85:81
[470] CW 85:78-9
[471] CW 85:235
[472] CW 85:235-6
[473] CW 85:363-4

ideologies" and to accept the latter "only to the extent that you can assimilate them and adapt them to the Indian scene."[474]

In an interview with an American journalist on September 24, 1946, he remarked "I felt compelled to come into the political field because I found that I could not do even social work without touching politics" but continued to feel that "political work must be looked upon in terms of social and moral progress."[475] He had abandoned his legal career and life as a private person as he could not "sit still while the people are being ravaged."[476] He declared "this job will be finished only with my death...[and] I have to be watchful, whether it is the foreign government...or indigenous, if I am a social reformer in the true sense of the term."[477]

The Tide Turns: The Struggle for Freedom Comes Home

Deadlocks in the negotiations over the transfer of power continued into the last quarter of 1946 and into early 1947, mainly over the demarcation of Hindu-majority and Muslim-majority districts, in preparation for the partition of the country that, by now, even Gandhi had come to accept as inevitable. All the while public violence continued to increase and spread. Gandhi began a tour of Bengal—at that time the most restive region. It was also during this time that Gandhi alienated many co-workers over a private sexual experiment (that he proudly announced) in which he slept naked with his grandniece ostensibly to test the veracity of his celibacy.

---

[474] CW 85:367
[475] CW 85:368
[476] CW 85:369
[477] CW 85:369

In a public prayer meeting, on January 2, 1947, Gandhi offered Hindus and Muslims a common agenda to pursue rather than engage in senseless violence,

> Hindus and Muslims...are estranged from one another...but if both of them devoted themselves to the noble task of reorganizing the village life and improving their economic conditions through development of their cottage industries, they would find themselves working in a common task and unity would grow among them.[478]

In a speech at another prayer meeting, a month later, he decried the "power politics" that had entered even rural areas and politicians who had "less thought of the welfare of the villages and more of using them for increasing the parties' own power."[479] He advised volunteer workers "Work singly, courageously, intelligently with all local help...and, if you do not succeed, blame only yourselves and no one else and nothing else."[480] In a prayer meeting, on February 18, 1947, Gandhi noted "the distraction caused by conflicting advice by different leaders" and advised volunteer workers to "make their selection of their leaders and follow them...when the advice of the leader appealed to their heart and head."[481]

In the second quarter of 1947, the frenzy of communal rioting had spread to Bihar (west of Bengal) and Gandhi extended his "healing mission" there by making long tours alone and on foot to remote villages. In a discussion with Congressmen on March 19, 1947, he observed that, while they had found it relatively "easy to wrest power from

---

[478] CW 86:301
[479] CW 86:449
[480] CW 86:450
[481] CW 86:478

British hands," they had found it "very difficult to overcome [their] own weakness and to set up an efficient administration."[482] He noted, "Some people declare that I am out of date and...should give up all politics" and urged those that agreed to leave him.[483] In a prayer meeting in New Delhi on April 1, 1947, he reminisced about the "time when mine was a big voice...[and] everyone obeyed what I said...[but] now neither the Congress nor the Hindus nor the Muslims listen to me...crying in the wilderness."[484]

Speaking to Congressmen on April 17, 1947, Gandhi decried the "growing inconsistency between the public and private life of a Congress worker...goondaism [hooliganism], lack of discipline and carelessness...increasing day by day."[485] He insisted that, with Independence being imminent, there was a heightened need for "responsibility" among them and they had to "get rid of anger, intolerance, etc...to stand on [their] own" or become "caught up in a bigger bondage."[486] Meeting with some Englishwomen who were touring India, on April 19, 1947, Gandhi reverted to the main theme of his earliest pamphlet, Hind Swaraj, written nearly four decades ago (1909):

> ...the foreign power will be withdrawn before long...[but] real freedom will come only when we are free...of the domination of Western education, Western culture and Western way of living which have made our living expensive and artificial.[487]

---

[482] CW 87:121
[483] CW 87:121
[484] CW 87:187
[485] CW 87:295
[486] CW 87:295
[487] CW 87:310

He was more keenly aware than ever at this decisive juncture—the transfer of sovereign power to Indians—that his recommendations were never more likely to be ignored.

A few days later, speaking to Peace Committee members, he said, "do nothing just to please me...[and] you are welcome to leave me alone if my words fail to carry conviction."[488] Speaking to volunteers he said, "a great moral responsibility lies on your shoulders...if you lack the requisite strength, you should admit it humbly...otherwise carry on the responsibility...undertaken, faithfully utilizing all your resources, physical, mental and material."[489]

Speaking to constructive workers on May 13, 1947, Gandhi maintained that while Independence was "as good as come...it is only political independence" and there was no reason to believe that "once the British quit India there will be more comfort and convenience and the constructive programme would become superfluous."[490] He stated that, on the contrary, "Real hard work will have to be done only after independence...[until] poverty and unemployment are wiped out from India."[491] He remarked that this was likely "only when there is an awakening among the constructive workers" and that, while the country did need politicians, what it needed more urgently was "devoted constructive workers."[492] He declared, "it is suffocating to see the manner in which we marching towards freedom...[with] no light anywhere...[as] every

[488] CW 87:342
[489] CW 87:343
[490] CW 87:463
[491] CW 87:463
[492] CW 87:463

community is keen on grabbing" power and not on doing their duty, affording "a chance for the people to say that slavery was better than freedom."[493]

In a talk on May 24, 1947, he urged, "However precious political independence may be, we should not rest quiet till something tangible is done in terms of national welfare" and suggested that Indians aim at "such a social system from which exploitation will be completely eliminated and in which all work will be carried out in a democratic manner."[494] He appealed for "help in that work" as peace "established with the help of the army and police...conceal a smouldering fire of revolution."[495] He told the Congress ministers that he "pitied" them since "their condition is worse than that of prisoners."[496]

In the second quarter of 1947, the Cabinet Mission's scheme for an undivided Indian Republic was abandoned and the Muslim League's demand for a separate Pakistan formally accepted by all, including Gandhi. Gandhi now moved to Delhi where the rioting had become most severe. And the general unrest over shortages of food and other essentials was aggravated by frequent strikes.

Talking with some Socialist workers on May 27, 1947, Gandhi observed, "Indians have lived in slavery for 150 years and need to be trained for a different way of life...the transfer of power will remove many obstacles...[but] you have to do solid work among the people."[497] This would be the only way to ensure that the political freedom soon to be had would be translated into economic, social, and psychological freedom as well. He

---

[493] CW 87:463
[494] CW 87:527
[495] CW 87:527-8
[496] CW 87:528
[497] CW 88:15

urged them to "establish socialism" in the country but by implementing his constructive program at the grassroots,

> ...go among the poor in the villages, live as they live, be one with the village people, work for eight hours daily, use only village-made goods and articles...remove illiteracy among the village people, eradicate untouchability and uplift the women...establish...a living bond with the village people.[498]

He noted that "instead of doing such constructive work," Socialists were more inclined to "incite the people and call for strikes" which was "all right against the British...[but not] against [their] own countrymen."[499]

He declared that his instructions "apply to Congressmen, too" and urged "all public workers and all officers of the Government [to] forget their quarrels and disputes over ideologies and start learning and teaching spinning...and village industries."[500] He warned parliamentary politicians "A time will surely come when nobody will listen to...long speeches; nobody will even attend...meetings, for preaching sermons to the people without following those principles in your own lives does not work long in society."[501] He warned them that the people would sooner or later demand "an account of your own work...before they listen to you."[502] In a prayer meeting in New Delhi on June 3, 1947, Gandhi reminded the people that the new government "can rule over you only by pleasing you...your Panchayat Raj [self-government] has begun."[503] He

---

[498] CW 88:15
[499] CW 88:15
[500] CW 88:16
[501] CW 88:18
[502] CW 88:18
[503] CW 88:67-8

reminded the members of the civil service that their "duties have now become ten times heavier" and they had all to become "clean and straight."[504]

In another discussion with Socialist workers on June 7, 1947, Gandhi warned them "if you do not work in perfect harmony" with Congressmen, India's "newly-won freedom will be in danger."[505] He urged all parties and factions to "sit together and find a proper solution to problems on which there are differences."[506] He reminded politicians "the people want to see your work and your sacrifices...and will labour and look for perfection of character in you."[507] He warned them "if you incite the people and exploit...riots to establish new parties or spread your isms...God will never forgive your terrible crime of betrayal of the country."[508]

At a prayer meeting in New Delhi on June 28, 1947, Gandhi informed the people "the Constituent Assembly is discussing the rights of the citizen" in the new republic that was to be formed; but "the proper question...is rather what constitutes the duties of a citizen." Insisting that rights "cannot be divorced from duties," he explained, "satyagraha was born...by my always striving to decide what my duty was."[509] In a discussion with a Congressman on July 26, 1947, Gandhi declared, "if the Congress is to live as a potent force, it has to become a body of constructive workers...penetrating the villages'" if not "their legislators would practically be idle and the voters would be exposed to the machinations of the vote-catchers."[510]

---

[504] CW 88:68
[505] CW 88:96
[506] CW 88:96
[507] CW 88:97
[508] CW 88:97
[509] CW 88:230
[510] CW 88:426

On August 15, 1947, the transfer of power from British to Indian hands and the partition of British India into the republics of Pakistan and India took place. Gandhi was able to work a "miracle" in Calcutta in terms of getting the people to stop the rioting and carnage. However, he was not successful in accomplishing this feat in Delhi and continued to be preoccupied with attempts to pacify people of both communities.

In a discussion with workers in Calcutta on August 22, 1947, Gandhi maintained that a truly democratic society had "to be built up inch by inch in economic, social and political life...[and] considering the magnitude of the task, it would naturally require a very stout heart to grapple with the problem."[511] He urged volunteer workers to be "brave, intelligent and persevering" and warned them to be prepared for the fact that the "villagers might not readily respond...[and] might even prove hostile."[512] He also cautioned them that many vested "interests would have to be disturbed before the necessary change could be effected."[513]

In Harijan, on September 7, 1947, Gandhi urged students to "form one compact students' organization...that will become a mighty instrument of service.[514] He suggested "one purpose of the organization should be to discover the defects of the present education and seek to remove them so far as possible in their own selves."[515] He called for a "revised scheme" of the educational curriculum in which the "constructive and creative programme will naturally have its due place...[and] keep the politics of the

[511] CW 89:77
[512] CW 89:77
[513] CW 89:77
[514] CW 89:114
[515] CW 89:114

country free of the spirit of exploitation."[516] In doing so, he was probably harking back to a National Education scheme he had tried to implement in the 1920s when the Congress had just gained control of local governing bodies, but which scheme had failed owing to inefficient and, often, unenthusiastic implementation. He pointed out that the "foreign rulers had so devised and controlled the education of the country that the youth remained under that control and...foreign control was rendered as permanent as possible."[517]

A week later, he warned that "the constructive programme, to be of any use, has to be reduced to practice by the millions of India" under the guidance of "thousands of workers."[518] He pointed out that the constructive program made manifest "the necessity and beauty of the relation between religion and economics."[519] He insisted that

> ...for national work it is not necessary that national workers should have political power. But it is necessary for the people to keep in constant touch with those whom they put in power...But if the people were to realize their power and use it wisely and well, things would right themselves.[520]

In a speech at a prayer meeting in New Delhi, on September 28, 1947, Gandhi declared "nobody listens to me...had the people continued to listen to me...there never would have been that show of barbarism which Mr. Churchill has described with such relish and gross exaggeration...[and] we would have been well on the way to solving our economic and other domestic problems" through the patient implementation of the constructive

---

[516] CW 89:114
[517] CW 89:115
[518] CW 89:146
[519] CW 89:146
[520] CW 89:146

program.[521] He stated, "The scope for Government jobs is very limited whereas the scope for service is immense...there is no need to ask anyone what should be done."[522]

There was growing popular frustration and impatience at the ineptitude of the new government to tackle the crucial issues of restoring law and order and the supply of basic services and commodities. In a speech at a prayer meeting in New Delhi on October 9, 1947, Gandhi reminded the people "the Ministers...too are upset and disturbed...[but] have no experience of running a government...[and] have to work with limited resources."[523] He also pointed out that often the "people do not follow the instructions from their Government...even officials do not follow instructions...[and] become so arrogant that they think that...there is none to question them;" although a "mere frown" of the British "used to frighten them" in the past.[524]

In Harijanbandhu, on November 2, 1947, he reminded people who were asking him to intercede on their behalf with the new government that he had "neither any part nor any say in many things that are going on in the country" and that it was "no secret that the Congress willingly said good-bye to non-violence when it accepted power."[525] In a speech at a prayer meeting in New Delhi on October 24, 1947, he admitted that he had "ceased to be useful for any purpose other than unity."[526] Talking with Communists on October 25, 1947, he admonished them for being "caught in isms"[527] and urged them,

---

[521] CW 89:255
[522] CW 89:268
[523] CW 89:310
[524] CW 89:311
[525] CW 89:396
[526] CW 89:399-400
[527] CW 89:406

instead, "to find out what will suit the ignorant masses and act accordingly."[528] In a prayer meeting on November 3, 1947, he reminded Congressmen and the people that the new "ministers are of the people, from the people" and should not "arrogate to themselves greater knowledge than those experienced men who do not happen to occupy ministerial chairs."[529] Arguing for a less expansive, regulatory, and bureaucratic government, Gandhi declared that democracy would "break under the strain of apron strings" and could "exist only on trust."[530]

Through the end of 1947 and the beginning of 1948, Gandhi launched a "Do or Die" fast in which he resolved to starve to death if the communal violence did not come to an end. This piece of emotional blackmail was fairly successful in India and Pakistan but some Hindu patriots were angered at his insistence on paying a share of the cash balances of undivided India to Pakistan although Pakistan was engaged in military intrusion in Kashmir at that time. It was Gandhi's stand on this issue that motivated his assassination on January 30, 1948 by a group of Hindu fundamentalists. On December 11 and 12, 1947 Gandhi called a meeting of various constructive work organizations in a last-ditch attempt to get them to form a unified platform and agenda that would ensure the persistence of the constructive program in independent India, separate from the state apparatus that the Congress had now come to dominate.

In Harijan, on November 30, 1947, Gandhi complained, "the exclusive spirit is ever uppermost" among Congressmen and even volunteer workers.[531] He remarked that

---

[528] CW 89:406
[529] CW 89:468
[530] CW 89:468
[531] CW 90:86

the Congress no longer enjoyed "prestige and authority" among the masses and that having won freedom, it "seems not to know what to do with it" with the result that the situation in the country could be "almost mistaken for suicidal anarchy."[532] He urged concerned citizens like himself who "want constructive suggestions to come into play...to work to bring about a healthy atmosphere, promoting concord in the place of discord, peace in the place of strife, progress in the place of retrogression and life in the place of death."[533]

Desperately fatigued with the continuing communal violence across northern India, Gandhi declared, in a prayer meeting on November 25, 1947, "I am very much disturbed...my life has become a burden...I wonder why I am still here... when my word is...no longer...law."[534] He urged the people "if your minds are somewhere else, you are free to leave...without listening."[535] He noted, "Though the British have gone, the atmosphere of the British rule has not yet gone" as the current government continued "to spend extravagantly and the people did not get any return from such expenditure."[536]

In a discussion at the aforementioned Constructive Works Committee Meeting on December 11/12, 1947, Gandhi insisted, "No revolution is possible till you build your character" and noted that there was "already a slackness in constructive efforts."[537] He urged the various constructive work organizations to develop "the power to make the Government go the whole hog with them" and attributed their not having done so already

---

[532] CW 90:86
[533] CW 90:86
[534] CW 90:108
[535] CW 90:112
[536] CW 90:136
[537] CW 90:215

to the fact that their "faith in constructive work...was not deep or enlightened enough to illuminate [their] intellect and so [their] growth has been lop-sided."[538] He remarked that constructive workers gave the impression of being "generally lacking in imagination and intellect" and thus had "not sufficiently penetrated the hearts of the intelligentsia to convince their reason."[539]

He reminded volunteer workers, "Constructive work is not a strategy or a technique of fighting...[but] connotes a way of life...that can be carried on only by men who have adopted it by the heart as well as by the intellect."[540] He urged the various constructive work organizations to "come together and...work under the direction of a jointly chosen representative," asking them to "set their own house in order...[give] a good account of themselves, [and] work unitedly and in co-operation."[541] He warned, "politics has become corrupt...[and] contaminates...anybody who goes into politics."[542] He advised constructive workers "keep out of it altogether...the greater your inner purity, the greater will be your hold on the people."[543] Their work was to "resuscitate the village, make it prosperous and give it more education and more power" as the Constitution would be no good "if the village does not find its due place in it."[544]

He insisted that, even though constructive work was tedious, one could "generate great strength through it."[545] He recommended that the various constructive work

---

[538] CW 90:215
[539] CW 90:215-6
[540] CW 90:216
[541] CW 90:216-7
[542] CW 90:216
[543] CW 90:217
[544] CW 90:218
[545] CW 90:218

organizations "become the research laboratories in their respective fields...the instruments for building up of democracy" and that constructive workers as "specialists...should be able to tender to the Congress...advice on what needs to be done."[546] Thus, constructive workers had to "banish the very idea of capture of power."[547]

In one of his last meetings with Congressmen—a discussion with the committee charged with drafting a Constitution for the new republic—on January 27, 1948, Gandhi pointed out that "even for carrying out parliamentary activities the Congress had to carry on constructive activities in the country to maintain contact with the people and to educate them to understand Congress policies and programmes."[548] The Congress

> ...had also to rebuild a new society based upon truth and non-violence—a society not so much dependent on the existence of a strong and centralized government as on the intelligent co-operation of the people organized on a voluntary basis and inspired by the ideals of justice, tolerance and truthfulness.[549]

Gandhi warned the Constituent Committee that "unless the Congress took up this role, the Congress would gradually lose its moral influence and was likely to degenerate into a political party hankering only after power and position."[550]

In an editorial published posthumously in Harijan, on February 1, 1948, Gandhi observed that the Congress

> ...has won political freedom, but...has yet to win economic freedom, social and moral freedom...that are harder than the political, if only because they are

---

[546] CW 90:220-1
[547] CW 90:221
[548] CW 90:506
[549] CW 90:506
[550] CW 90:506

> constructive, less exciting and not spectacular...[requiring] the energy of all the units of the millions.[551]

He urged the Congress to "do away with its special register of members...[who] should now be co-extensive with all the men and women on the voters' rolls in the country."[552] He suggested that the Congress should keep on "its own register" only those people who were willing to constitute themselves as "a body of servants of the nation who would be workers doing the work allotted to them from time to time."[553] Gandhi pointed out that he had "only opened to view the distant scene" and that, if he had "the time and health," he would elaborate on "what the servants of the nation can do to raise themselves in the estimation of their masters, the whole of the adult population, male and female."[554]

In fact, Gandhi had been doing just that all through his long and tortuous career of public service and activism. Although often despairing of persuading his compatriots to look inwards and strengthen themselves and their society, even as they struggled against the various external forces—alien and indigenous—that exploited and brutalized them, Gandhi never relented in his efforts. Finally, aware that, even as India obtained political sovereignty, she still stood in great need of healing and regeneration, he sought to leave his compatriots with a coherent vision of a program for reconstruction in the form of a pamphlet. But perhaps the best "object lesson" he bequeathed to them was the one he had embodied all his life and expressed succinctly when he said: "My life is my message."

---

[551] CW 90:497
[552] CW 90:498
[553] CW 90:498
[554] CW 90:498

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CONSTRUCTIVE PROGRAM: ITS MEANING AND PLACE IN GANDHI'S PROJECT

Gandhi's speech and writing were not organized in any systematic way, were mainly driven by exigency, and were bound by specific situations and, therefore, his utterances often seem inconsistent if not contradictory. Therefore, a rationalistic or formal argumentative approach to the study of Gandhi's discourse to understand his theses, purposes, and motives would be inappropriate. This premise is particularly relevant to the study of his constructive program that was even more contingent, improvisational, and far-ranging than his satyagraha campaigns.

In the thesis that I submitted for my master's degree, I also studied Gandhi's movement rhetoric. I set out to account for Gandhi's immense success in garnering popular participation in his satyagraha campaigns (Non-Cooperation, Civil Disobedience, and Quit India) and the poor response he received to his other appeals such as his calls for discipline, sacrifice, and selfless service. Analyzing a sampling of Gandhi's utterances from Kenneth Burke's dramatistic perspective, I employed concepts such as "identification," "consubstantiality," the "pentad," and its "ratios" to explain how Gandhi's satyagraha campaigns and polemical utterances offered his audience a more coherent and compelling narrative of perfection and redemption and a more easily accessible framework of political action. A Burkeian pentadic analysis would be suitable, for example, to read Gandhi's polemical and seminal pamphlet, Hind Swaraj (1909) in which he lays out a sweeping critique of Pax Brittanica, modernity, and indigenous nationalisms while framing it as a clash between good and evil. The more

mundane issues in his later pamphlet, Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place (1941, 1945), and the various other messages of his constructive program, however, rely less on plotlines and a teleological narrative than on discrete (if repetitious) invitations to specific actions that are held out as intrinsically and experientially rewarding.

Gandhi's rhetoric relating to the constructive program, however, is not powerless and its rhetorical power derives from three main characteristics: (1) it is metaphoric, (2) it is ideographic as it contains evocative terminology that encapsulates complex arguments and ideologies, and (3) it is iconic or contains nonverbal (such as visual, material, or performative) symbols that function as ideographs. Gandhi's metaphors structure and color important clusters of concepts, attitudes, values, etc. (for example, characterizing the British Empire as "The Kingdom of Satan on Earth" and referring to the various initiatives of his constructive program as "Experiments in Truth"). He employs succinct ideographs to articulate complex socio-economic ideologies in colloquial ways, such as his insistence that all volunteer workers and aspiring leaders engage in "bread labour" (earning one's livelihood through honest, non-exploitative means), that the rich hold their wealth in "trusteeship" as a superior alternative to coercive socialization and, above all, his recommendation of "swadeshi" (patronage of local good and services) as the basis for not only the economic, but also the social and political regeneration of the rural economy and pre-modern industry. Finally, Gandhi adopted many iconic objects and practices that visually and performatively evoked aspects of his ideology and politics such as his use of simple indigenous-style clothes made entirely from hand-spun and –woven fabric and adherence to third-class rail travel on his many tours. Moreover, he gradually

transformed himself into an icon of his movement as he strove to embody in his person and lifestyle all the principles and practices that he espoused.

In this chapter, I discuss six ways in which Gandhi's movement, in general, and his constructive program, in particular, transformed the politics of the nationalist movement and gave it a character that is strikingly "postmodern." I explain how the constructive program worked to 1) invite new forms of identification and subjectivity, 2) evolve a repertoire of relationships and praxis that would perpetually challenge iniquitous ones, 3) formulate a comprehensive program of direct popular action that common Indians could participate in, 4) outline a regimen of discipline for the regeneration of individuals and communities, 5) create enthusiastic and empowered publics at the local level throughout the subcontinent, and 6) invite a new set of leaders to range themselves as an integrated and perpetual counter-public against the establishment.

Calling New Indians into Being

Dilip Gaonkar defines a social imaginary as a structure of identification wherein "we see ourselves as agents who traverse a social space and inhabit a temporal horizon, entertain certain beliefs and norms, engage in and make sense of our practices in terms of purpose, timing, and appropriateness, and exist among other agents."[1] A fundamental aim of Gandhi's constructive program was to hold out new social imaginaries to help Indian nationalists, volunteer workers, and common Indians reconstruct their identities, agendas, and actions to become more independent and empowered. As early as 1901, he urged Congress delegates to "stand side by side with the other civilized races of the world

[1] "Toward New Imaginaries" 10

in foreign enterprises and self-government."[2] Thus, Gandhi rejected the official claim that India was an inalienable part of the British Empire, bound to Britain through imperatives of inferiority, subordination, and obligation. He also dismissed indigenous imaginaries that claimed the allegiance of Indians on the basis of religion, denomination, caste, and ethnicity. On his return to India in 1914, he spent two years touring the country to acquaint himself first-hand with conditions all over the subcontinent and declared that many received traditions and customs caused India to be "ever torn by conflict from within" and had to be discarded or modified.[3] He found the "progressive" modern imaginaries of nation-state, representative democracy, civil society, and global capitalism equally unacceptable as they excluded the vast majority of Indians and, indeed, rested on their exploitation. He insisted, in 1908 (before the publication of his polemical Hind Swaraj), that the modern definition of freedom and progress were "not enough for the nation's prosperity and happiness."[4]

Gandhi's rejection of the various social imaginaries vying for the allegiance of Indians in the early twentieth century was a symptom of his deeper rejection of the ideological foundations of these imaginaries—modernity itself:

> that historically unprecedented amalgam of new practices and institutional forms (science, technology, industrial production, urbanization), of new ways of living (individualism, secularization, instrumental rationality), and of new forms of malaise (alienation, meaninglessness, a sense of impending social dissolution).[5]

---

[2] CW 3:215
[3] CW 14:56
[4] CW 8:373
[5] Taylor 91

He saw how modernity, through the vehicle of imperialism, had ravaged the economy, society, and even the psychology of Indians and was fearful that it would continue its depredations in independent India. He, therefore, maintained that modernity (and not just British imperialism) was the real evil that Indians had to overthrow, and independence had to be achieved at various levels simultaneously—personal, interpersonal, social, economic, political, and spiritual.[6]

But the rejection of modernity was not simplistically a "return" to an ideal pre-modern way of life. Some traditional values had to be resuscitated, but they would have to assume very different forms in a postmodern India—forms that would have to be creatively evolved by Indians through untiring experiments and incremental learning through trial and error.[7] The modernist surrender to the imperatives of science was to be replaced by a commitment to a truly religious way of life—the embodiment and enactment of life-affirming values beginning at the personal level and moving ever outward.[8] The paralyzing subservience to technology was to be replaced by modes of production that respected the centrality of human creativity and the maintenance of equitable relations of production, distribution, and consumption.[9] Textile manufacture at the domestic level was also a way of coping with "distresses, dissensions, and defeats and consequent dejection" and could "establish an indissoluble bond [with] the lowliest in the

---

[6] It is in Hind Swaraj that Gandhi presented his most scathing and comprehensive attack on modern civilization and British imperialism.
[7] At the beginning of his public career in India (in 1915), Gandhi pointed out that, more than money, "men of the right sort with right sentiments, with an abiding love and charity and full of faith in their work" were needed (CW 13:61).
[8] Gandhi recommended the extension of the "domestic rule and its obligations" to all areas of interpersonal and social life, forging the nation as extended family (CW 15:249).
[9] Gandhi sought to transform the textile industry into a cottage industry coordinated at the village, provincial, and national levels to secure self-sufficiency and the revival of the rural economy to serve as a paradigmatic model for other sectors of the economy.

land."[10] Mass industrial production had to be relinquished in favor of communitarian self-sufficiency, and urbanization replaced by rural regeneration.[11] The modernist stress on individualism as a means of self-fulfillment had to give way to the pursuit of the extension of the self through public service. For example, in 1919, in a meeting of volunteer worker just before the Non-Cooperation Movement, he urged each of them to "know the duty he owes...having been born in India."[12] The establishment of a formal secularism in public life was to be supplanted by religion that was simply politics by another name (politics, to Gandhi, was nothing more than religion in action) and could, therefore, never be banished from the public sphere.[13]

What was needed, instead, was the search for a more inclusive, just, and compassionate religion/politics. The pursuit of goal-oriented, rationalized programs of action implemented by a coercive state and an elitist civil society was a severely limited and even potentially dangerous form of politics that could never secure worthy ends and would leave the marginalized and wretched masses of Indians untouched. The alienation generated by modernity could be avoided by cultivating a deep identification with others and the meaninglessness of materialism replaced with a renewed sense of purpose in the collective pursuit of the common welfare broadly conceived. He offered the pursuit of sarvodaya (the conception of development as a broadly inclusive enterprise that bound rich and poor, rural and urban, in a common quest for prosperity and equity) as the best

---

[10] CW 30:105-6

[11] This was to be effected by the encouragement of village industries—an initiative Gandhi promoted throughout his career in India.

[12] CW 15:284

[13] Gandhi explained that religion and politics were inseparable because honest politics "presupposes immense discipline...great self-restraint...charity, and...seeks not to coerce but to convert" (CW 35:104).

way to ensure "the creation of so much fresh industry, the organization of [millions] into a joint cooperative effort, the conservation and utilization of the energy of the millions and the dedication of [millions] of lives to the service of the motherland."[14]

Gandhi was resigned to the emergence of the nation-state as the fundamental unit of twentieth-century global politics, but conceded only a minimal role to it in independent India. As late as 1948, Gandhi suggested that the Congress disband itself as a modern political party. Barring a small percentage of members that would be needed to run the national government, he urged the majority of Congress members to "work for and in the villages of India."[15] He conceived of the state as a residual institution—the body that would undertake those necessary tasks that could not be accomplished at the local level through cooperation and free association: defense, fiscal policy, foreign relations. It was certainly not to be a central, architectonic entity, occupying the commanding heights of the economy and society, robbing the citizens of the major part of their autonomy and initiative through coercion and exclusion.

Gandhi discounted the modern conception of the public sphere—ostensibly "a space of discussion...self-consciously seen as being outside power...supposed to be listened to by power, but...not itself an exercise of power...ideally rational and disengaged from partisan spirit."[16] Gandhi maintained that such an entity was a naïve fiction and he harbored no hope that it could serve as a disinterested force in public affairs let alone as an originator of the radical and revolutionary change that was needed for the transformation of independent India as its members "made little attempt to

---

[14] CW 30:452-3
[15] Constructive Program 32
[16] Taylor 114

understand and influence the masses."[17] Power, instead, had to be conceived of as a dynamic force that pervaded all human action and interaction at every level of human existence—from the intrapersonal to the international—and, therefore, exercisable by all, even the lowest of citizens. The only way to check the potentially dangerous effects of power was to render it transparent and accountable and to adhere uncompromisingly to the principle of nonviolence. Gandhi maintained that such an enterprise required "the vigilant, intelligent and honest watch not of one worker but of thousands...imposing on themselves the hardest discipline of which they may be capable."[18]

Gandhi was also skeptical of the modern social imaginary of civil society—those relatively few members of society who are "linked in an economy, can seek access to a public sphere, and move in a world of independent associations."[19] In the context of a colonial society such as India, in particular, such amenities and opportunities were the preserve of a privileged few. The vast majority of the population were ignored and, indeed, often victimized by the institutions of civil society. Gandhi worked for the inclusion of the marginalized and oppressed in public life in the living present, not in some distant future when they could be deemed "fit" to enter polite society. His mass campaigns aimed at securing civil rights, better wages and working conditions, more equitable taxation, and better social amenities for untouchables were aimed at including them in civic action in ways that would preclude violence and yet contribute to a radical transformation of society, economy, and politics. Gandhi maintained that the "common

---

[17] CW 18:326
[18] CW 36:292. This is one of the numerous instances in which Gandhi calls for a diasporic and nomadic body of volunteers who could serve as the guardians of the public interest while promoting public welfare through social service.
[19] Taylor 122

people" wanted to "play their part, are ready for self-sacrifice, but do not know the way" and as long as the members of civil society did not "speak to the people in their own language...how effective could they expect their leadership to be?"[20] Throughout his career, and particularly through the constructive program, he sought to create empowering and enabling subjectivities and agencies for the poor and powerless.[21]

Finally, Gandhi rejected the argument for India's necessary integration into the web of global capitalism to survive in the new world order (especially after the two Great Wars). He insisted upon swadeshi— the decentralization of production, distribution, and policy-making, and the precedence of immediate and local issues and forces over remote and distant ones.[22] Embracing such a reorientation, Indians would have a frugal material culture, but could ensure greater equity and less disparity while enhancing the conditions for the cultivation of the inner life so crucial to genuine independence.[23]

Gaonkar defines social imaginaries—the means by which individuals understand their identities and their place in the world—as "a fluid middle ground between embodied practices and explicit doctrines."[24] Gandhi did not expound explicit doctrines but offered a series of ideographs that served a similar purpose.[25] Even the bulk of the embodied practices he prescribed were not mandatory but had to be experimented with and

---

[20] CW 16:347

[21] He did this through initiatives such as sanitation, cattle-rearing, and reforestation, whereby common people could nonviolently claim physical space and resources to better their lives without appealing to outside powers.

[22] CW 13:219

[23] Gandhi insisted on voluntary poverty as expiation for the sins of educated Indians, the basis of true freedom of the spirit, and the litmus test for eligibility for leadership as early as June 1906 in South Africa (CW 7:14).

[24] "Toward New Imaginaries" 11

[25] Some of Gandhi's more common ideographs are ahimsa (nonviolence), swadeshi (localism), sarvodaya (collective welfare), and swaraj (self rule—both spiritual and political).

modified or discarded if found unhelpful.[26] His ashrams, where a rigid regimen was imposed on residents, occupied a central but small place in his movement—they were to serve as training centers in which volunteer workers would experiment with practices, technologies, and programs, and carry the "successful" ones to the masses via social service. When Gandhi addressed people (and even volunteer workers) outside his ashrams, however, he only invoked the new social imaginaries.[27]

Gandhi's social imaginaries were often reinventions of settled concepts and the synthesis of traditional and modern values—a hallmark of his politics. The "nation," for Gandhi was not a political fabrication marked by ideological and legal fictions and coercive structures and procedures, but a consciousness among a people of being members of the same "family"—a group of people whose existence, identities, and wellbeing were linked inextricably for better or worse. "Democracy" was not limited to the formal rituals of representative politics enacted at periodic intervals, but implied direct popular participation in public life through nonviolent activism and social service. This necessitated, in turn, a major devolution of political power and policy-making to the communitarian level and a restoration of much of the individual and communitarian autonomy that had been usurped by the modern state.[28] "Civic action," then, did not remain the preserve of the elite who had access to the institutions of civil society and the

---

[26] Practices such as spinning, manual labor, prayer, adopting a village and transforming it, were integral to participation in the constructive program not only as instrumental tasks but as sites of community-building and learning.

[27] Some of these new social imaginaries were the experimental community, the volunteer army, and the call to exercise leadership through the processes of diaspora, exile, and nomadism within the nation.

[28] Under Gandhi's leadership, the Congress underwent a tremendous transformation from a small debating society of elite Indians who bargained with the imperial power, into a mass movement that challenged the established order through renunciation, non-cooperation, and civil disobedience.

resources of the mediated public sphere and "welfare" and "progress"— personal, communitarian, and national—came to be defined in psychological and spiritual rather than material terms. Finally, "leadership" was no longer the prerogative of the elite possessed of economic, political, and social capital, but could take the form of a commitment made by those willing to play the role of "experimenters in truth" and "servants of the people." Leaders would have to evolve and promote creative solutions to the problems faced by the common people and exert their influence only through exemplary guidance and solidarity via public service.[29]

Through the various social imaginaries that Gandhi advocated through his satyagraha campaigns and his constructive program, he promoted a network of praxis rather than a programmatic scheme of instrumental action.[30] Gaonkar's explanation of the crucial difference between instrumental action and praxis helps us understand what Gandhi was trying to accomplish through his constructive program:

> Unlike instrumental action, the dominant and dehumanizing mode under capitalism, praxis unfolds in public space where one freely engages with others in activities that have no predetermined purpose. In praxis, unlike poiesis (making), the agent is neither detached from nor in control of what he or she is doing. Emotion as well as intellect, character as well as interests, indeed, being itself, are caught up in praxis. Occurring as it does under conditions of plurality and contingency, praxis is fragile and frustrating. Yet the agent is drawn to praxis

[29] Gandhi invited any volunteer worker who aspired to leadership positions to enact leadership by adopting a village.
[30] In 1917, Gandhi laid down the beginning of the constructive program, inviting people to revert to the vernaculars, include women in the movement, study rural conditions, and draw up a course of instruction and improvement for rural India (CW 14:123-7).

> because only in praxis can one grasp and experience what it is to be autonomous...a future-oriented emancipatory endeavor that generates novelty and alterity in its wake...indistinguishable from a transformative revolutionary politics.[31]

It is clear that the transformation of relationships and "praxis" was the basis of Gandhi's movement and this feature marks its difference from the other nationalist projects (such as those of the Congress, the Muslim League, and the Socialists) that conformed to the provisions of instrumental action. Gandhi's constructive program, more so than his satyagraha campaigns, promoted the development and propagation of a popular praxis that would be able to render the instrumental programs of the colonial and postcolonial establishments accountable and limited while promoting a parallel countermovement. In 1922, Gandhi held out the constructive program as a therapeutic regimen, claiming "it will steady and calm us...wake our organizing spirit...make us industrious...render us fit for swaraj...cool our blood."[32]

Beginning at the level of the individual and the community of face-to-face interaction, Gandhi wanted India to shift from being a "heteronomous society" in which "laws, norms, values, myths and meanings are posited as given once and for all" to becoming an autonomous society that could "call into question [its] own institutions and representations and the social imaginary that underwrites them."[33] True swaraj lay not only in ending imperial rule, but also in rethinking the norms and standards that informed the status quo thereby reclaiming autonomy for the individual and the community.

---

[31] "Toward New Imaginaries" 8
[32] CW 22:490
[33] Gaonkar, "Toward New Imaginaries" 8

Gandhi declared that gaining freedom entailed a "struggle not only against the environments that seek to crush [us] but also a struggle between [our] own ranks...more prolonged, more exacting and even more bitter."[34] Such reflexivity and scrutiny, to be truly effective, "requires a collective capacity to question the institutional order and the social imaginary significations embedded in it."[35] Gandhi thought that autonomy at the individual level would inevitably result in the actualization of autonomy at the societal level. And, participation in the constructive program would enable individuals to cooperate with one another to extend their personal autonomy into the social realm. Volunteer workers were to serve as the catalyst for such a gradual but radical and enduring transformation of the lives of millions of Indians—a revolution from below.

Gandhi often invoked ideographs and articulated rules that stressed austerity and personal responsibility, but he advanced no coherent ideology. Democratic praxis occupied a more prominent position in his project and through his two-pronged strategy—his satyagraha campaigns and the constructive program—he promoted a series of interrelated "cultural performances and counterperformances" that he hoped would produce the "solidarities" necessary for the development of a lasting commonality of identity and purpose that any people must achieve in order to become a nation.[36] Such an organic nation would be much more genuine and potent than a nation-state based on doctrinaire formulations or an instrumental agenda implemented by a coercive state and a hierarchical bureaucracy. Throughout his career in India he severely criticized the imperialistic, modern political climate in which "we cannot trust anybody...where we

[34] CW 38:284
[35] Gaonkar, "Toward New Imaginaries" 8
[36] Gaonkar, "Toward New Imaginaries" 17

have no sense of honour, when we cannot allow our words to remain unaltered for 24 hours."[37] Holding out the constructive program as a superior alternative, he claimed that "village reconstruction work" was really "the organization of the peasantry and workers upon an economic basis" and was also the best way for would-be leaders to "enter into their hearts" and "identify...completely with the masses."[38]

Constructive Program as Repertoire for Mass Direct Action

Through the constructive program, Gandhi tried to build horizontal and vertical linkages among various publics in the fragmented nationalist movement at the level of praxis rather than through a hierarchical organization manned by a cadre of obedient subordinates. Attending to the ways in which social movements evolve across space and time, Chabot observes that many develop a "repertoire"—"a set of routines that a protest group learns, shares, and applies in its interactions with opponents, potential followers, and bystanders."[39] A repertoire is not a set of a priori prescriptions, but "emerges from actual experiences of struggle, not from abstract philosophy or ideology, and is limited by the collective knowledge, memory, and social connections a protest group can muster at the time of collective action."[40] Chabot outlines one of the unique repertoires—satyagraha—that Gandhi developed as he tried to transform the nationalist movement into a potent but nonviolent campaign seeking not only political independence from Britain, but also a radically new economy, society, and polity in independent India:

> At the strategic and organizational level, it emphasized self-reliance, openness in communication, self-discipline, and honorable negotiation with the authorities.

---

[37] CW 38:310
[38] CW 38:311
[39] Chabot
[40] Chabot

> At the individual level, it defined the appropriate behavior for leaders and foot soldiers involved in direct action campaigns...at the most practical level, [it] identified steps that had to precede any direct action campaign.[41]

Gandhi acknowledged failure when the mass campaigns of Non-cooperation and Civil Disobedience degenerated into mob rioting.[42] Gradually, through trial and error, and through persistent reflection on past experiences and improvisation of tactics and practices, he sought to build satyagraha into a repertoire of nonviolent mass direct action that would be able to confront and hold accountable the establishment and powerful vested interests.

Through the constructive program, however, Gandhi tried to develop a different kind of repertoire than he had through satyagraha. Satyagraha was essentially a "negative" repertoire comprised of nonviolent reactions to injustice and irresponsible government such as renunciation, self-restraint, non-cooperation, and civil disobedience. The constructive program was the "positive," complementary dimension of Gandhi's movement whereby Indians would becoming independent of the state and modern civil society by cultivating self-reliance and self-determination in their local communities.

Chabot notes that Gandhi's satyagraha campaigns were not programmatic but based on a negotiated repertoire that he developed in collaboration with his followers and the general public:

> ...the Gandhian repertoire called for an open dialogue with potential followers. Through mass meetings, articles, correspondence, speeches, and books, Gandhi

---

[41] Chabot

[42] He also laid blame on the Congress for failing to "permeate the masses" 35 years after its founding. CW 19:103

and other satyagrahis engaged in a public discourse on the concrete meaning of satyagraha for India and its inhabitants.[43]

Gandhi's constructive program was similarly constructed through his speeches, editorials, and interviews.[44] He also addressed questions, concerns, and suggestions of followers and members of the reading public through meetings, personal correspondence, and the recognition and endorsement of noteworthy volunteer workers, held up as exemplary role models. Through this network of interaction with and among volunteer workers, a repertoire evolved that translated the verbal texts of the constructive program into living action across the subcontinent. Why this platform of volunteer workers and nonviolent activists eroded after Gandhi's death is a question needing further investigation that lies outside the scope of this study.

A New Program of Political Action

Political discourse is, among other things, "a battle for space."[45] Gandhi's movement sought to reclaim spaces dominated by the imperial power and its modern agents in the area of formal politics (via satyagraha) as well as in the areas of personal and communitarian life (via the constructive program).[46] Thus, through satyagraha and the constructive program, Gandhi sought to confront imperial "governmentality"—the

---

[43] Chabot

[44] Chapter 3 outlines a selective trajectory of his messages that directly relate to Gandhi's promotion of the constructive program in its broad outline. However, the efforts to promote individual initiatives of the program are too numerous to attend to in this study, its main object being to present the constructive program as a broad revolutionary platform of social, economic, and political reform that Gandhi invited various constituencies to participate in.

[45] Patton 225

[46] In 1921, he reminded Indians that they had to free themselves from a crushing system that comprised not "Englishmen merely...[but] thousands of Indians trained by them." CW 20:461

"modern system of distributing bodies and their relations... refining a once general space of sovereignty into specialized spaces of relation: political, social, economic, and cultural."[47] Even with the end of imperial rule, Gandhi's movement would have to confront the postcolonial establishment (that bore too much resemblance to its imperial parent) through the expansion and intensification of the constructive program in independent India.[48]

As Thomas Pantham notes, Gandhi rejected a revolutionary "emancipatory process" that aimed "simply to raise the poor to the position of their oppressors" as this strategy "would be a within-paradigm move, enhancing the forces of violence."[49] What he wanted, instead, was a revolutionary change in the perceptions and attitudes of the parties to the conflict so that "all the members of the initial conflict situation may find their true or moral human interests in a new, communitarian synthesis."[50]

Throughout his career, Gandhi promoted "direct action" at the grassroots level—in the hundreds of thousands of "dungheaps" (villages) that dotted India—to create a radical transformation of consciousness and praxis that would enable the "dumb millions" to assert themselves. His understanding of power, thus, was in line with that outlined by Anthony Giddens, whereby power is seen not as "a type of act" but as a relational dynamic "instantiated in action" and exercised as a "regular and routine phenomenon."[51] Through the constructive program, Gandhi intervened in various regular

---

[47] Patton 225
[48] CW 22:490
[49] Pantham 184; CW 26:244
[50] Pantham 184; CW 26:371
[51] Giddens 91

and routine phenomena that he identified as crucial to building and sustaining true independence for the individual, the community, and the nation.[52]

Judith Brown, an astute critic of Gandhi's career, observes that, for Gandhi, "true radicalism, getting to the root of problems, and instigating change at the very roots, was a moral enterprise, a matter of changing hearts, of transforming the attitudes on which actions were based."[53] She characterizes this fundamental aspect of Gandhi's movement as an impediment to its success as a political force. Labeling it "moral radicalism," she claims that it constituted "a flight from politics, a refusal to grapple with hard issues in the contemporary world on any significant scale."[54] She argues that, while it "made him indeed an inspirational figure," it also ensured that it made him "a weak exemplar for radical action and reconstruction in post-independence India."[55]

Beginning with the failure of the Non-Cooperation Movement, however, Gandhi maintained that the "true freedom" he wanted could not be pursued through instrumental programs formulated by a central authority and implemented coercively. It was necessarily the product of a lifelong quest that had to begin in individuals by means of introspection, renunciation, and personal discipline and, then, move outward into interpersonal relationships, communitarian ties, and regional, national, and global allegiances. Thus radical action and reconstruction could truly emerge only when every citizen undertook it individually and then worked with others to accomplish it

---

[52] In 1929, for instance, he suggested that volunteer workers should gauge their success in nation-building according to "how many lavatories they cleaned, how many wells they dug…how many patients they attended on" CW 41:51-2
[53] "The Making" 30-1
[54] "The Making" 31
[55] "The Making" 31

communally—a radically different politics from that of modern representative democracy driven by the state and institutions of civil society.

Constructing a New Self through Discipline

The desire for radical change and immediate results make violence an inevitable aspect (if not the primary means) of revolutionary movements. While Gandhi did seek radical change, he abhorred the prospect of widespread violence, contending that it would rend asunder the fragmented political economy of the subcontinent. Throughout his career in India, therefore, he promoted satyagraha and the constructive program as a two-pronged strategy to nonviolently resist and counteract, respectively, what Stephen Hartnett describes as "the psychology and political-economy of terror," particularly the subtle but pernicious terror generated by the institutions, policies, and practices of the modern state.[56] Initially through his satyagraha campaigns but, increasingly, through his constructive program, Gandhi framed his efforts at radical reconstruction through the metaphor of experimentation. He maintained that he was not offering a readymade plan of action that would guarantee certain outcomes. Instead, he was inviting volunteer workers (but also career politicians and ordinary Indians) to live more conscientiously through a regimen of self-discipline and public service, and to enact the freedom they wanted without succumbing to the disastrous temptation of answering terror with terror.[57]

Thus, through satyagraha and the constructive program, Gandhi was not offering any a priori agenda or programmatic template for revolution. Rather, as Hartnett tries to do through poetry, Gandhi's movement sought to encourage "personal rumination on

---

[56] Hartnett 17

[57] In 1934, he urged volunteer workers to "learn the art and beauty of self-denial and voluntary poverty...and generally...cultivate personal purity" and independence would follow. CW 57:350

complicity... questions of commitment and the historical obligation of engaged citizens to at least attempt to speak the truth to...the numbing expanse of global power politics."[58] Gandhi believed, unlike other nationalists, that any attempt to initiate revolutionary change in the social order had to begin within individuals devoted to effecting that change—leaders had to "become the change they sought in the world." This self-discipline involved the renunciation of all the bonds that tie the self to oppressive enterprises—for Gandhi, all of modernity's trappings—even its vaunted benefits such as Medicine, Law, Education, and Industry.[59] Only then would potential reformers be in a position—morally and pragmatically—to withdraw participation in the structures and apparatuses of imperialism and modernity (his Non-Cooperation Movement), confront the injustices and atrocities promoted and tolerated by the state and its collaborators (his Civil Disobedience Movement), and demand the abdication of an oppressive regime (his Quit India Movement).

Antony Copley, a Gandhi biographer, describes Gandhi's overriding political philosophy as "Sartrean existentialism," claiming that, "as a practitioner of karma yoga" (the quest for salvation through good acts), he sought "personal liberty through action," transmuting a "private battle with his own sense of inadequacy" into the "public expression of a political agenda." [60] Gandhi promoted this struggle with the self as the primary agency for civic participation. Modern nationalists advocated the programmatic restructuring of the country by a strong, centralized state with the creation of a mass, consumerist society and the systematic application of science and technology to solve

---

[58] Hartnett 20
[59] While Hind Swaraj (1909) remains Gandhi's definitive and seminal indictment of modernity, it is a common theme throughout his career (especially in India).
[60] Copley 36

India's overwhelming problems. Gandhi, on the other hand, held out self-discipline and public service as a platform of revolutionary reform available to every Indian and he insisted that it was only a political movement moored in such foundations that could secure "true freedom" for all the millions in independent India.[61]

A Program for Constructing a Public

Gandhi's constructive program remarkably reflects the defining characteristics of a "public" identified by Michael Warner.[62] It did constitute a "public" insofar as it was "a space of discourse organized by nothing other than discourse itself" and existed "by virtue of being addressed."[63] The constructive program had no institutional or legal framework to promote it, only the discursive efforts of Gandhi and volunteer workers. Gandhi invited the diverse constituencies of rural India to participate in his satyagraha campaigns and constructive program often through nonverbal "discourse"—such as strategic changes in dress, diet, rituals, performances, and practices. Volunteer workers, spread out in villages and working with marginalized constituencies like untouchables and women, had to serve as catalysts of radical change through solidarity and exemplary guidance. However, Gandhi also used verbal discourse to reach other key constituencies like educated Indians, nationalists, and students.

In his attempt to engage the masses in civic participation through nonviolent activism against injustice and radical reform through social service, Gandhi faced the difficulty of addressing millions of Indians unlikely to form members of a concerted and

---

[61] In 1936, he told volunteer workers that the only way they could help India gain swaraj was by living among the villagers and showing them "how to live." CW 63:417

[62] In my discussion of the constructive program as a public-formation enterprise, I have drawn heavily on Michael Warner's definitions and analyses of publicity and publics.

[63] Warner 50

enthusiastic public. Most Indians were also characterized by other traits that Warner lists as being detrimental to public-formation, "a kind of political depressiveness, a blockage in activity and optimism" that leads to "a disintegration of politics toward isolation, frustration, anomie, forgetfulness."[64] Initially, Gandhi tried to draw common Indians into public action through his satyagraha campaigns which proved to be very effective. However, when each of his major satyagraha campaigns—the Non-cooperation Movement, the Civil Disobedience Movement, and the Quit India Movement—turned violent, he realized that few people were capable of or committed to nonviolence as a terminal value and he began to emphasize the "positive" aspect of his project—the constructive program—as the best avenue for mass involvement in democratic politics and radical reform.

Ironically, in his efforts to recruit volunteer workers for the constructive program, Gandhi invited a modern public comprised of educated Indians, nationalists, and students, to reject modernity.[65] He invited a very modern public to adopt an anti-modern (or postmodern) agenda. However, many elements of his satyagraha campaigns and the constructive program were grounded in modern concepts and values although Gandhi expressed them through a traditionalist (albeit vastly reworked) vocabulary.[66]

With Gandhi's assassination, his movement became essentially leaderless—no one could match his iconicity, moral authority, prodigious energy and drive, or ability to reach and link diverse constituencies. His novel technique of satyagraha was

---

[64] Warner 52

[65] From Chapter 3, it is clear how often he addressed his urging and admonitions regarding effective leadership of the constructive program to urban audiences.

[66] Parekh's book, Colonialism, Tradition, and Reform, offers a comprehensive study of the hybridity, intertextuality, and eclectic influences of Gandhi's discourse.

appropriated by several local and regional movements in independent India, although it was often deployed without regard to the principles of nonviolence and truthfulness that Gandhi insisted upon.[67] The constructive program also became little more than an empty (albeit compelling) commonplace in the Congress's election campaign rhetoric after Gandhi's death. While the Congress did incorporate some of its elements into its own policies and programs, the spirit and praxis of Gandhi's constructive program was largely abandoned after 1948.

Warner observes that it is the "concatenation of texts through time" that creates publics and Gandhi generated a plethora of texts—speeches, pamphlets, editorials, published correspondence, and interviews—that invoked other texts: religious and secular, indigenous and alien, old and new. In doing so, as Bhikhu Parekh has explained, Gandhi created a distinctive discourse that integrated several disparate ideologies into a hybrid framework that bounded his satyagraha campaigns and his constructive program. After Gandhi's death, his followers were unable to sustain the basic integrity of his eclectic and esoteric project, unable to continue a coherent body of discourse that integrated diverse and often incompatible subtexts and interests. The constructive program as a discursive framework, with the power to create a participatory public from diverse constituencies, disintegrated.

What made the constructive program relevant to those who volunteered as village workers or simply incorporated some of its elements (like spinning or sanitation work) into their lives, was the fact that it promised desirable changes in their lives. The

[67] Even during his lifetime, Gandhi complained about the use of his name and terminology by people who had little or no connection to his satyagraha campaigns or the constructive program.

elements of the constructive program were selected for the perceived importance based on Gandhi's experiences during his extensive tours of the subcontinent and his encounters with the "dumb millions" of rural India. He selected problems and concerns that presented the most immediate and fundamental dangers to the new nation that would come sharply into focus with the end of imperial rule.

While the constructive program was never as spectacularly popular as Gandhi's satyagraha campaigns, it did manage to generate a body of volunteer workers and ashram members who worked with Gandhi on various "experiments" in lifestyle, economic activities, social relations, and civic engagement. After Gandhi's death, with a lack of creative and compelling leadership, much of the impetus of the constructive program was lost and many of its initiatives were reduced to mechanistic rituals or nostalgic reenactments.[68] Some unobtrusive elements of the constructive program were even taken out of context and appropriated by the Congress and the modern nation-state it founded.[69]

Public discourse can serve to galvanize the public/s it invokes to undertake action in the public sphere, although it does not always aim to do so, and not all publics are motivated to act. In order to serve such a galvanizing function, Warner argues, public discourse must be marked by "punctual and abbreviated...circulation... [since at] longer rhythms or more continuous flows, action becomes harder to imagine."[70] Gandhi's satyagraha campaign did serve to stimulate extensive and intense mass activism. He also

---

[68] After his death, Gandhi's ashrams became museums rather than laboratories of socio-economic experimentation and the Government of India undertook the compilation of his writings as the main way of preserving Gandhi's legacy in independent India.
[69] There were, for example, some largely ineffective attempts at land reform by urging landlords to voluntary donate land to landless peasants and encouraging industrialists to create foundations and trusts for the welfare of workers and the unemployed.
[70] Warner 68

included the masses in the independence movement through his frequent tours across the subcontinent and his attention to a series of specific issues that were relevant to multiple constituencies.[71] Increasingly disillusioned with Indians' inability to adhere to the principles of truthfulness and nonviolence in his satyagraha campaigns, however, Gandhi began to privilege the various elements of his constructive program as channels to direct the unrest and energy of the masses into more constructive enterprises. Less dramatic, less specific, and more protracted, these initiatives did not elicit as much enthusiasm or support as his satyagraha campaigns. Towards the end of Gandhi's career, with his advanced age, poor health, and the death of his secretary, the circulation of Gandhi's hitherto copious messages waned. Moreover, the introduction of the power politics of representative democracy into India (by the introduction of local self-government in 1919 and provincial self-government in 1935) meant that there now were much more tangible and alluring alternatives of political action compared to the difficult, slow, uncertain, and relatively unexciting platform of the constructive program.[72]

In his satyagraha campaigns, Gandhi's dramatistically framed problems he strategically selected for their symbolic power and widespread provenance and his novel modus operandi allowed for mass participation (satyagraha). His campaigns, therefore, were potent enough to motivate hundreds of thousands of peasants, urban workers, and even women to leave their traditional places and roles and even risk their lives to participate in them. His constructive program turned out to be much less of a crowd-puller, demanding an indefinite period of total commitment, less specific goals and plans

---

[71] For instance, he successfully mediated a labor dispute between textile mill-owners and workers in Ahmedabad and got land-revenue decreased in a drought-stricken province.
[72] In 1937, he urged politicians to appreciate that "talk of bread is all that the people understand...[and] they have no use for politics." CW 65:101

of action, and a difficult praxis that involved much introspection, self-discipline, renunciation, and selfless public service.

In promoting the constructive program as a network of like-minded strangers (volunteer workers) who would be working individually, but also in consultation with one another, Gandhi introduced an unprecedented interaction among diverse peoples historically at odds with one another. The ad hoc structures and informal channels of communication that marked the constructive program were poorly defined, unstable, and vulnerable to interference from hostile vested interests. The social spaces that the constructive program entered (rural zoning, land and agricultural relations, child-rearing and education) were sensitive sites jealously guarded by powerful interests and the kind of initiatives Gandhi was promoting (such as the integration of untouchables in community life, the inclusion of women in public life, the refashioning of the educational system) required solid social support and wide cooperation which were more often than not unavailable.

While most volunteer workers were educated Indians who wanted to participate in the nationalist movement more directly, they were more often than not divided from one another and from their rural host communities by geographical, social, and cultural distance. Moreover, most of the constituencies that Gandhi addressed through the constructive program were marginalized, impoverished, and isolated with very few incentives to engage in that freewheeling and open-ended enterprise. Many of the elements of the constructive program were also unpopular with volunteers and

constituencies.[73] They were variously perceived as pre-modern and regressive (village self-sufficiency), overly spiritual (celibacy and worldly renunciation among volunteers), and radically unconventional (co-education, public roles for women). The amalgamation of intertextual references (many of them redefined or worked over) in the discourse of the constructive program was also a source of much confusion and skepticism as Gandhi drew on Hindu scripture and mythology, Christian ethics, the jargon of science and experimentation, secular humanism, and even modern nationalism to formulate the agendas, agents, agencies, and purposes of his constructive program.[74] Finally, the genres (the dialogue, the sermon, the polemic), texts (transcripts of speeches, editorials, published correspondence and interviews), and idioms (largely Hindu, with elements of Christianity and Western nonconformist philosophy) embedded in the discourse of the constructive program had little resonance for the majority of common Indians.

Warner argues that it is discourse that instantiates a public and, if that discourse does not extend or at least maintain the scope and frequency of its circulation, "the public dwindles to a group."[75] This is exactly what happened to the constructive program after Gandhi's death. Even before his death, and especially after the Quit India Movement (1942-4), Gandhi's influence in Indian politics waned and so did his public presence in general. He was old and sick and unable to travel as extensively as he had done before to promote the various initiatives of the constructive program and encourage volunteer workers. Moreover, after 1942, he was increasingly preoccupied with efforts to contain

---

[73] In 1937 he urged volunteer workers to undertake constructive work with "constant vigilance, effort, study and diligence" and to not "conclude that such work is dull." CW 66:24

[74] Bhikhu Parekh offers a meticulous analysis of the various sources that influenced Gandhi's discourse and programs.

[75] Warner 75

the spreading communal violence that accompanied the prospect of imminent independence and the partition of British India into Hindu- and Muslim-majority states. Circulation of constructive program-related discourse dwindled and fewer volunteers were recruited. This trend intensified on Gandhi's death and his band of followers and volunteer workers broke up into "enclaved" publics rather than the cohesive and burgeoning "counter" public he wanted them to become in independent India. Especially after Gandhi's death, when the Congress launched its massive modernization program, the constructive program dwindled and was side-lined, and it became a quaint relic rather than the vibrant engine of radical reform Gandhi intended it to be.

Constructing a Perpetual Counter-public—Creating a New Leadership

Gandhi expected his constructive program to have limited appeal, with volunteer workers remaining a small presence in independent India. Owing to its radically different agenda, agents, agencies, and purposes, the public that formed around the constructive program resembled what Warner calls a "subpublic", or a "specialized public… focused on particular interests, professions, or locales."[76] Through the discourse of the constructive program, Gandhi mainly addressed educated Indians urging them to undertake the leadership in effecting radical change in India's degraded villages.[77] Here lay the essential paradox of Gandhi's project—he aimed at the amelioration and empowerment of the marginalized sections of Indian society (women, untouchables, peasants, etc.) through the initiatives of the constructive program, but he turned to the

[76] Warner 84

[77] In 1941, he continued to insist that the furtherance of national welfare lay in the "concentration in villages of the city people and their being occupied and occupying the villagers in productive and educative work." CW 75:202

very segments of the population whose domination he sought to usurp—educated, high caste/class men—for the leadership of these initiatives.

In his appeals to potential volunteer workers, Gandhi invoked what Warner calls "a counterpublic…a dominated group [that] aspires to recreate itself as a public and, in doing so, finds itself in conflict not only with the dominant social group, but also with the norms that constitute the dominant culture as a public."[78] There was really no single discernible dominant group in colonial India, but a diverse mélange of constituencies and parties with varying and fluctuating levels of power. English-educated Indians constituted the most powerful group poised to inherit the "commanding heights" on British withdrawal. However, they were challenged by many lesser but powerful constituencies, such as religious extremists (Hindu and Muslim) and revolutionary socialists, and their power remained essentially precarious. Gandhi sought to forge a unique and unprecedented counterpublic that would provide an alternative leadership— a platform of volunteer workers that would stand above the fray of modern partisan politics, renounce the promises of modernity, dedicate themselves to nonviolent activism against inequity, and engage in "experiments" to evolve more humane and just structures, policies, and practices.

Gandhi claimed the moral high ground for his constructive program in the politics of imperial and postcolonial India, arguing that only selfless and sincere persons could aspire to leadership in such an enterprise. The constructive program did not mark itself off a dominant public but a dominant paradigm—modernity in all its forms—as it aimed to displace modern political, economic, social, and psychological terms with more

[78] Warner 80

equitable ones. While Gandhi urged educated Indians to lead the constructive program, his ultimate goal was to empower and enable the "dumb millions" to participate in nonviolent activism and social service to improve their own lives individually and communally.

The initiatives of the constructive program were aimed at replacing modern institutions, practices, and values but Gandhi insisted that all resistance had to be nonviolent and ultimately reconciliatory. He was, therefore, charged variously with being "utopian" (by those who wanted a more specific agenda of development and a programmatic plan of action for its realization like many volunteer workers), "regressive" (by those who subscribed to the promises of modernity like modern nationalists), and "reactionary" (by those who wanted revolutionary, even violent, structural change in the foreseeable future like Communists and religious fundamentalists). Many publics jostled along with the constructive program for hegemonic dominance of the national consciousness and the project of nation-building. The other powerful publics —the Congress, Muslim League, Socialists, and various religious fundamentalist groups—aligned themselves with modernity in varying degrees and via diverse idioms.[79] They were the forces that Gandhi opposed, wittingly and unwittingly, through the constructive program, and it was ironic that he invited members of these publics to participate in it.

Warner notes that when the members of a public are sufficiently committed to an issue or agenda, they can "acquire agency...act historically...rise up...speak...reject false promises... demand answers...change sovereigns...support troops...give mandates for change...be satisfied...scrutinize public conduct...take role models...deride

[79] Gandhi's constantly pleaded and admonished these constituencies that did not share his distrust of modernity as an acceptable worldview and development paradigm.

counterfeits."[80] The publics that Gandhi invoked sometimes did some of these things—most spectacularly in his satyagraha campaigns, but also through various initiatives in his constructive program (such as the campaign against untouchability, new educational experiments, and the reclamation of the textile industry as an enterprise of popular rather than mass manufacture). However, Gandhi failed to evolve an internal, self-sustaining network that would continue to hold together the various initiatives of the constructive program as an integrated engine of radical, nonviolent reform at the local level throughout the subcontinent.[81] Not charged with a specific agency, not provided with a unifying agenda, not having developed an enduring network of members with a sustained economy of discourse, the constructive program was hopelessly compromised in independent India, especially after Gandhi's assassination.

Many of the publics mobilized through Gandhi's satyagraha campaigns (Untouchables, Muslims, urban workers) metamorphosed into what Warner calls "social movements" in that "they acquire[d] agency in relation to the state... enter[ed] the temporality of politics and adapt[ed] themselves to the performatives of rational-critical discourse."[82] They invoked and contested (often successfully) the "governmentality" of the imperial power (and later, the postcolonial state), compelling reform and greater accommodation in legislation, economic policy, social structures, and constitutional provisions.[83] Moreover, the satyagraha technique was appropriated by several later

---

[80] Warner 88

[81] A constant theme in his speeches, especially when he was on tour in the rural areas, was about the lack of volunteer workers that crippled the constructive program.

[82] Warner 89

[83] The untouchables, for example, managed to gain many concessions in the areas of education, political representation, employment, and financial assistance.

movements in India and all over the world although some of them were not faithful to Gandhian ideals, values, and methods.[84]

However, as Warner states, many counterpublics regard the transformation of their public presence into a social movement as an undesirable development—an abandonment of their original purpose, "their original hope of transforming, not just policy, but the space of public life itself."[85] Gandhi envisioned his constructive program as just such a counterpublic. Through it, he sought to transform not only the material lives of the impoverished masses, but wanted to outline a new paradigm of development (opposed to that of modernity) that would result in a radical (albeit nonviolent) transformation of all aspects of lived experience—material, social, political, psychological, and spiritual.[86] Through the constructive program, Gandhi aimed above all to effect a radical and extensive regeneration of India while avoiding the coercion and violence upon which the modern nation-state and revolutionary movements were inevitably founded.

Conclusion

One of the most insightful examinations of Gandhi's movement (particularly his constructive program) and its role in Indian nationalism is that of Asha Kaushik. Attending to the symbolic aspects of Gandhi's movement, she argues that Gandhi was trying to achieve a "paradigm shift" in the political consciousness of Indians; not just a substitution of one set of rulers for another, but

---

[84] Even prominent movements like the US Civil Rights Movement and the South African struggle against apartheid borrowed selectively from Gandhi's long career and discourse.
[85] Warner 89
[86] In 1946, he pointed out to Congressmen that "reform like charity must begin at home" and thus any attempt to reform the nation had to proceed from reform at the individual level and gradual movement outwards. CW 84:427

> A 'displacement' of the logic of the modern western paradigm of 'growth-development-modernization' and 'replacement' of the same by an Indian civilizational argument, in favour of a non-hegemonic liberatory-communitarian order.[87]

In such a reading of Gandhi's movement, Hind Swaraj can be seen to play the role of "displacer" while The Constructive Program (as well as the many texts that preceded and accompanied it) plays that of "replacer," although the vast intertextuality between the two texts precludes rendering such a dichotomy absolute. Through the constructive program, Gandhi emphasized a direct "involvement with culture" providing educated Indians and the masses marginalized from the forums of formal political power, with "an antidote to political 'non-commitment.'"[88] Moreover, as Kaushik notes, Gandhi's "innovative key political symbols such as Swaraj (freedom), Sarvodaya (welfare), Satyagraha [nonviolent activism], and Swadeshi (economic patriotism)" were employed as "a strategy of communication, communion, articulation, mobilization and political struggle."[89] Hind Swaraj fulfilled the functions of "mobilization and political struggle" as Gandhi set out his ideas, challenged powerful leaders, wooed supporters, and transformed the composition and agenda of the nationalist movement even as he challenged the hegemony and legitimacy of the imperial power. His constructive program, on the other hand, focused attention on the functions of "communication, communion, and

[87] Kaushik 9
[88] Kaushik 38
[89] Kaushik 39

articulation" that Indians would have to pursue even after independence as they re-oriented and regenerated themselves, their communities, and their nation.[90]

Thus, as Kaushik notes, Gandhi opposed not just British rule, but all kinds of "domination...[that] had to be discerned and fought not only at political but simultaneously at socio-economic, cultural and attitudinal levels" through his two-pronged movement.[91] Through satyagraha and the constructive program, Gandhi did not merely seek "the evolution or sudden change in the material existence of the people from one stage to another, but a change in the consciousness of the masses" by involving them in direct (but nonviolent) political, social, economic, and cultural activism and service.[92]

Bhikhu Parekh describes the constructive program as "a woefully inadequate answer to India's appalling problems [that] had an extremely limited practical impact."[93] This it may seem if viewed as an instrumental program aimed at accomplishing material goals. But Gandhi envisaged the mission of the constructive program quite differently—it was meant to initiate a decentralized and empowering alternative to elitist developmental initiatives and give ordinary people a chance to take charge of their own lives and pursue their own welfare as they saw fit and in any way they could. Parekh concedes, however, that

> ...its symbolic and pedagogical value was considerable. It stressed the interdependence of political and economic issues, encouraged a sense of solidarity

---

[90] In 1947, he reminded volunteer workers that theirs was a "great moral responsibility" that they had to prosecute by "faithfully utilizing all [their] resources, physical, mental and material." The struggle for independence was not over with the mere gaining of political independence from Britain. CW 87:343

[91] Kaushik 46

[92] Gaur 205

[93] Colonialism, Tradition, and Reform 316

with the poor, helped create a dedicated group of grassroots workers capable of mobilizing the masses, and fostered a tradition of social service.[94]

In addition, as Kaushik notes, the constructive program "succeed[ed] in bring the deep-seated schisms of Indian society on the national agenda, to be seriously addressed and confronted."[95] Thus, it did promote important if intangible benefits that prevented a further disintegration of the postcolonial state than was effected in 1947 with the creation of Pakistan.

Gandhi set out to mold a set of revolutionaries who would not accept that violent and tyrannical means could be justified by ostensibly noble ends. Moreover, as the Rudolphs note, he did not set out to create a political party that would "seek and use power...to govern, to realize certain ideal and material goals, and to allocate resources, patronage, and honor."[96] Rather, as the Rudolphs note, Gandhi's argument was that the "cure for the ills that affected state or society lay in changing men's inner environment, their hearts and minds, not their laws and institutions."[97] Seeking to avoid the corrupting influence of coercive power and the enervating influence of complicated bureaucracy and remote institutions, Gandhi strove to maintain "a contingent and temporary relationship to political and other organizations [by] building...ashrams, service societies, and the Congress itself, and then leaving them to the direction of others, or disbanding them when he thought their goals had been realized."[98] He deliberately followed an ad hoc organizational policy to ensure that structures and procedures would play only an

---

[94] Colonialism, Tradition, and Reform 316
[95] Kaushik 177
[96] Gandhi: The Traditional Roots 82
[97] Gandhi: The Traditional Roots 82
[98] Gandhi: The Traditional Roots 82-3

instrumental and not a constitutive role in his movement.[99] The purposes of Gandhi's movement were better served by cultivating the immediate, personal, and contingent relationships occasioned by the constructive program in local communities throughout the subcontinent. Thus, in spite of its alleged ineffectiveness in dealing with many specific issues, the constructive program continues to persist even today as

> ...a powerful set of cultural meanings and practices that configured the post-independence political identity of many Indians (secularism and satyagraha), compelled the character of the society they lived in (passive revolution and class conciliation), and constituted a dream so absorbing (the future welfare of all) that it might turn into a nightmare for any Indian government that did not control it.[100]

The Congress-led government that took over the postcolonial state gradually expropriated the constructive program, ultimately turning it into a series of stylized rituals (spinning bees), days of observation (Sanitation Day), commercial ventures (urban handicraft and textile emporia), etc. Its existence as an ongoing platform of civic participation through activism and social service whereby it could hold vested interests transparent, accountable, and liable was effectively short-circuited. However, the vast archive of the rhetorical traces of Gandhi's movement retains its potential to serve as a heuristic and inspirational invitation to explore and initiate experiments in ways of being and acting as autonomous and empowered individuals in a world where poverty, desperation, and violence are more prominent than ever.

---

[99] In 1947, he urged his followers to even abandon him if his "words fail[ed] to carry conviction" for them. CW 87:342

[100] Fox 168

CHAPTER FIVE

EXPERIMENTS IN TRUTH AND THE UNENDING DIALOGUE

In Chapter 4, I argued that Gandhi's constructive program was an integral part of his larger movement. I explained how it transformed the nationalist movement fundamentally by 1) offering new forms of identification and subjectivity, 2) evolving a repertoire of relationships and praxis to confront inequity and exploitation, 3) outlining a comprehensive program of direct popular action to engage ordinary Indians in their local communities, 4) prescribing a regimen of discipline and reform for the regeneration of individuals and communities, 5) creating motivated and empowered local publics throughout the country, and 6) inviting a new set of leaders to range themselves as a perpetual counter-public against established powers.

As outlined in Chapter One, Partha Chatterjee brings in a clear verdict of the ultimate failure of Gandhi's project. I have also noted how Bhikhu Parekh describes Gandhi's constructive program as "a woefully inadequate answer to India's appalling problems [that] had an extremely limited practical impact."[1] However, Gandhi claimed to attempt nothing more (or less) than to initiate the development of a decentralized and participatory alternative to the elitist and exploitative social, economic, and political systems of colonial India. He directly addressed ordinary people, through his satyagraha campaigns and the elements of his constructive program, urging them to transform their own lives for the better without depending upon a remote and callous establishment.

---

[1] Gandhi's Political Philosophy 316

Attention to only the empirical "effects" of the constructive program ignores the fact that Gandhi's did not promote it as a definitive strategy to achieve social, economic, and political reform. He sought, instead, the evolution of a network of relationships and a praxis that would radically transform the lives of ordinary Indians by empowering and engaging them in a program of cooperative social work that would be entirely nonviolent and voluntary. Parekh does concede that the constructive program's

> symbolic and pedagogical value was considerable. It stressed the interdependence of political and economic issues, encouraged a sense of solidarity with the poor, helped create a dedicated group of grassroots workers capable of mobilizing the masses, and fostered a tradition of social service.[2]

But I argue that the constructive program aimed at a much larger and deeper transformation of politics in India. Gandhi sought to initiate a social, economic, and political revolution through the transformation of identities, bodies, relationships, and practices. He claimed that, although he expected his "critics [to] laugh at the proposition" compiled in his pamphlet, he considered it "still worth the attempt."[3] He perceived India's imminent independence from the British Empire as a crucial crossroads. With the end of British rule, Indians (at least the educated few) would get the power of self-determination, and he urged them to dismantle not only the imperial state, but the infrastructure of modernity as well. He also recommended that the new nation dedicate itself to the pursuit of the constructive program which should "more fittingly be called construction of Poorna Swaraj or complete Independence by truthful and non-

---

[2] Gandhi's Political Philosophy 316
[3] Constructive Programme 3

violent means" to be pursued as an end and reward in itself.[4] While Gandhi did outline a basic agenda and tried to mobilize resources and collective action to pursue it, he was less interested in achieving particular outcomes than in effective deep changes in consciousness, identity, morals, ethics, values, attitudes, interests, and behavior—individual and communitarian—the only basis for a genuine and permanent reorientation.

In this chapter, I attend to the ways in which the discourse of the constructive program (and not just the 1941/1945 pamphlet of the same name) functioned as a significant force in the transformation of Indian politics in the first half of the twentieth century. I argue that, while prosecuting the constructive program, Gandhi challenged and complicated the fundamental elements of India's political (rhetorical) culture: 1) the nation, 2) the citizen, 3) political leadership, 4) the public sphere, and 5) civic action. I track various utterances through Gandhi's career and suggest how they complemented his attempts to initiate a radical transformation of politics in colonial India.

Reconstructing the Nation

In South Africa, Gandhi played the role of "prophet" as he mediated between colonial authorities and Indians and among Indians.[5] This ability to speak across divides—racial, cultural, religious, and linguistic—fueled Gandhi's increasing prophetic involvement in public affairs. The politics of the prophet involves "a discourse that acknowledges the unrealized potential of the culture and promises its eventual earthly

[4] Constructive Programme 3
[5] Robert Terrill defines the prophet as a leader who is "simultaneously insider and outsider" (26).

consummation" and "is most vibrant when common ideals are shared among its audience."[6]

Early in his public career in India, dealing mainly with Congressmen and educated Indians—those who had a stake in Pax Britannica—the voice of prophecy remained an appropriate choice as Gandhi called them to a more disciplined and fulfilling performance of an empowered citizenship. Even after his disillusionment and break with the imperial system (calling for swaraj in 1914), Gandhi's leadership was sought by diverse nationalists who all had a common enemy in British rule and the prophetic voice worked well again during his satyagraha campaigns. After the failure of the Non-Cooperation Movement, in 1921, however, when Gandhi began to lay greater emphasis on the constructive program, there was a significant change in his voice. He began to speak increasingly in what Terrill calls the voice of "prudence" or the voice in which the leader encourages citizens to become "active critics of the dominant culture, able to make independent judgments regarding their relationship to it."[7]

Addressing its Calcutta session in 1901 (during a visit to India from South Africa), Gandhi urged the Congress to maintain a higher profile in the international arena, asking Congressmen to "testify to [India's] ability to stand side by side with the other civilized races of the world in foreign enterprises and self-government."[8] Still confident of the essential fairness of British rule and advantages of being a part of the British Empire, he was eager to see India take her place in the top tier, alongside the "White Dominions" of Canada and Australia. By 1908, however, his nationalist ideals and

---

[6] Terrill 26
[7] Terrill 26
[8] All quotations of Gandhi's utterances in this chapter are taken from Chapter 3, which is arranged in a chronological order.

aspirations seem to have changed dramatically when he declared that "what people...all over the world...call swarajya [independence] is not enough for the nation's prosperity and happiness." He continued to subscribe to the prevailing paradigm of nationalism as the basis of the modern world order when he warned South African Indians, in 1909, that they had to awaken to a stronger sense of citizenship and national pride as "the winds of self-respect and patriotism...[were] blowing on every side" and that they would "sink into utter insignificance or be squeezed out of existence like fleas if, at this time when the nations of the world are competing with one another, they do not wake up and assert themselves."

Gandhi returned to India for good in 1914 and spent the next four years touring the country. He was shocked at the picture of misery and degradation he encountered wherever he went, and lamented at a political conference in 1917 that the main reason for India's predicament was that she was "ever torn by conflict from within." Gandhi seems to have abandoned all the prescriptions of modern nationalism by this time and described the nation as an ultimate extension of "familial relations." He declared, in 1917, that in the process of nation-building, "Government of self...is the first step...Then the family...[then] the castes." By 1919, he began advocating the need to reject the nation-state as the ultimate expression of human solidarity and regretted that "In modern times, in no part of the earth have the people gone beyond the nation stage in the application of satyagraha."

The poor performance of the Non-Cooperation Movement prompted Gandhi to urge Indians to reconsider what independence and nationhood would have to mean to them if they were to attain true freedom and independence. He declared, in 1921, that

British rule was not comprised of "Englishmen merely" but also "thousands of Indians trained by them" and this modern colonial state that they seemed to be happy to perpetuate albeit without the Englishmen was "a vicious system that taints all who belong to it." In 1924, he insisted that the first task Indians faced was to completely reconsider the nationalist movement begun in 1885 that had "Hitherto...been a struggle and a yearning for a change of heart among Englishmen" but now the struggle had to be "transferred to a change of heart among the Hindus and Mussalmans...before they dare think of freedom they must be brave enough to love one another, to tolerate one another's religion, even prejudices and superstitions and to trust one another."

In 1927, he warned nationalists of all hues that the "nation-building programme can leave no part of the nation untouched" and that they would "have to react upon the dumb millions...learn to think not in terms of a province, or a town, or a class, or a caste, but in terms of a continent and of the millions who include untouchables, drunkards, hooligans and even prostitutes." Dismissive of a measure of local self-government that the Constitution of 1919 had bestowed upon Indians, and critical of the way elected Indian officials had continued to engage in politics according to the British model, he warned them that their new-found empowerment was nothing more than "an increased agent's share in the bureaucratic Government...an increasing share in the exploitation of the dumb millions."

Reiterating the need for internal reform and accountability within the nationalist movement and the local self-governing bodies that Indians were not manning, Gandhi reminded Indians, in 1928, that "Driving out the English will not by itself establish swaraj in India" and that such self-rule would simply be a "swaraj of barbarism, freedom

to live like pigs in a pigsty without let or hindrance from anybody." Addressing the Congress in 1928, he pointed out that it faced "a struggle not only against the environments that seek to crush you but also a struggle between your own ranks...more prolonged, more exacting and even more bitter."

The (British-dominated) Provincial and All-India Governments and the Civil Service interfered in the workings of the (Indian-dominated) local bodies so that their members resigned in protest. The Congress turned to Gandhi to lead a satyagraha campaign against the Government but he refused to do so and suggested, instead, that Congressmen should engage in introspection and renunciation in order that they become fit enough to engage in non-cooperation and civil disobedience. He also pointed out, in 1929, that the key to removing the British was to recognize and shake off "the hypnotic spell...[of] British rule" that was accomplished through its "organization more than its military strength...[an] organization to which the people were made by very subtle methods to respond." The success of the nationalist movement would depend not so much upon its ability to displace British authorities through force but upon its ability to resist and replace British rule in all its forms. In 1930, Gandhi reminded nationalists that not only the British personnel were responsible for the crushing regime under which Indians suffered, but also (and maybe more so) "the indigenous interests that have sprung up from British rule, the interests of monied men, speculators, scrip holders, land-holders, factory owners and the like...living on the blood of the masses, and...as callous as the British principals whose tools and agents they are." The nationalist movement and the enterprise of nation-building needed attention to internal reorganization as much as it needed the removal of the foreign power.

For the next decade-and-a-half, Gandhi continued to caution politicians, vested interests, workers, students, and voluntary workers that their quest for independence and self-determination had to go beyond efforts to attain formal political sovereignty and had to include attempts to include the vast remainders that any modern state was bound to leave behind—the majority of women, peasants, and untouchables. Even in 1946, when the British intent to withdraw had been announced and began to be negotiated, Gandhi decried the fact that Congressmen did not know "the kind of independence they want...[and] recite the formula almost parrot-like...their notion of independence...means Congress Raj"—English rule without the Englishman. He insisted that "Independence must begin at the bottom" and pressed to articulate his vision of a nation vastly different than the one the British were going to leave behind, he described it as

> a structure composed of innumerable villages...[in] ever-widening, never-ascending circles...not a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom...[but] an oceanic circle whose center will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units.

He acknowledged that he "may be taunted with the retort that this is all Utopian" but insisted that "India [must] live for this true picture, though never realizable in its completeness." In 1947, on a less abstract note, Gandhi observed that while "the foreign power will be withdrawn before long...real freedom will come only when we are free...of the domination of Western education, Western culture and Western way of

living which have made our living expensive and artificial." Asked to describe the elements that would act as replacements, Gandhi recommended the building of local alternatives all over the country through the determined prosecution of the constructive program.

With the approach of independence in 1947, riots broke out all over northern India and Gandhi lamented "it is suffocating to see the manner in which we are marching towards freedom...[with] no light anywhere...[as] every community is keen on grabbing power." He declared that the breakdown of law and order and the absence of a strong vision of a new nation widely held by all Indians offered "a chance for the people to say that slavery was better than freedom." He decried Congressmen's preoccupation with legalistic issues and elite politics, writing "the Constituent Assembly is discussing the rights of the citizen...the proper question...is rather what constitutes the duties of a citizen...satyagraha was born...by my always striving to decide what my duty was." Gandhi suggested that one way of getting out of the quagmire of power struggles and constitutional wrangles was for the citizens of the new nation to consider where their loyalties and duties lay and to cooperate with one another on to execute these duties and let the nation emerge from their efforts—another vague and utopian prescription.
Late in 1947, Gandhi acknowledged the failure of Indians (and himself) to evolve a sense of nationhood that could harmonize their diversity, interests, and aspirations under the aegis of a national framework. He described the situation as "suicidal anarchy" and stated "Though the British have gone, the atmosphere of British rule has not yet gone."

Alternately engaging in satyagraha campaigns and promoting various elements of the constructive program, Gandhi shifted back and forth from the prophetic voice to the

prudential voice unable to come up with a coherent and comprehensive framework for integrating the two elements of his movement into a consistent, popular platform of sustained direct action. Moreover, after independence, given the crisis that the new state faced with the genocidal violence that accompanied the Partition, Gandhi was unable (or unwilling) to maintain a movement of prudential protest against the new indigenous government. With the loss of his charismatic leadership after his assassination in 1948, the constructive program sank into obscurity with a few regional leaders pulling it in different directions.

Gandhi's nationalist rhetoric emphasized the fundamental unity of all Indians, a claim he found easier to substantiate in South Africa (among an expatriate Indian minority in a foreign land) than in India where long-standing rivalries erupted frequently. He claimed that, given their enormous cultural diversity, Indians could unite as a nation only by committing to certain principles and values enacted through radically reinvented identities, relationships, and practices. The main principles Gandhi prescribed for a true and lasting unity were ahimsa (nonviolence), swadeshi (localism), and sarvodaya (the pursuit of the welfare of all). However, these values were not widely appreciated and it was Gandhi's innovative technique of nonviolent activism, satyagraha, that was always more popular. But satyagraha was only a tactic of resistance meant to secure rights and redress in particular situations. It could not provide the symbolic and material resources needed to constitute the diverse peoples of the subcontinent into a nation. It was only through the constructive program, Gandhi maintained, that Indians could unite in a new consciousness, matrix of relationships, and repertoire of practices that would improve their lives.

In trying to create a transcendent plane on which to base the new India, however, Gandhi explained away or ignored powerful and divisive identities and affiliations as insignificant details and urged Indians to pay attention to the common moral and material predicament that all the peoples of India shared. He sought to erase fundamental differences in ideology and lifestyle by advocating a minimalist, ascetic regimen that would be acceptable to few. He tried to placate impatient and frustrated marginalized constituencies clamoring for immediate relief by begging them to put the "national interests" of stability and peace before their own and "earn" the rights they were demanding by attending to their duties more earnestly. He confused Indians of all religious persuasions by holding out a synthetic, multi-religious mythology that was incomprehensible or unacceptable to orthodox Hindus, low-caste Hindus, and non-Hindus alike.

Green observes that, "as one becomes familiar with what Gandhi did, and what he and others said about it, one can recognize things he is not putting into words."[9] He argues that "such silences are a part of Gandhi's presence" and had a significant impact on his movement.[10] Gandhi tried to dismiss or minimize, as far as possible, all kinds of indigenous conflict—and there were several. Religion, caste, economics, geography, history, and language all were significant obstacles to developing a national consciousness that all Indians could identify with. He insisted that the constructive program would have to take precedence over satyagraha in independent India as it was the better vehicle to create a transcendent nation built around collective, constructive efforts to address common problems. However, he was unwilling (or unable) to specify

[9] Green 11
[10] Green 11

plans of action to address the many inequalities, injustices, and frustrations that persisted into independent India except to urge nonviolent activism and social service at the local level. This strategy—the essence of his constructive program—remained for most people (but especially modern nationalists, vested interests, and educated Indians) a dubious remedy given the extent and intensity of the social, economic, and problems that faced India and the urgency with which solutions were desired.

Reconstituting the Citizen

Determined to use only nonviolent means to realize the radical reforms he wanted, early on in his experiments Gandhi decided to direct his efforts at individuals within their local communities, eschewing the often violent power struggles of formal politics and the impersonal and coercive manipulations of institution building and restructuring. As Joseph Alter explains:

> the body, in some sense, stands outside of culture but squarely at the intersection where people try to invest themselves and their fragmentary world system with meaning...people experience the world through their senses, and the body as a whole is, at once, the subject, object, and medium of experience...the body as a whole is, all at once, a sensory self, a product of history, and a thing of nature.[11]

Accordingly, Gandhi chose to attend to "technologies of the self" and "technologies of production" (not "mass production," as he put it, but "production by the masses") over "technologies of sign systems" (rhetoric among them) and "technologies of power" (coercion and violence) as the most appropriate means to work towards a truly free and

[11] Alter xv

just society—a society in which people would not be overwhelmed or dominated by the technologies of their making.[12]

In early 1902, speaking at a public meeting of Indians in South Africa, Gandhi blamed "Indians themselves...for the feeling of hatred raised in the Colonials against them." He charged them with being inadequate and ineffective as citizens of the British Empire and declared that if they "claimed the rights of British subjects, they must recognize the responsibilities also of that position." He called them to a more engaged presence in their local communities that conformed to the expectations of the imperial authorities. Feeling the need to reach a wider audience, he started a newspaper, Indian Opinion, in 1903, to dispel "the prejudice in the minds of the Colonists, arising out of misunderstanding the actual status of the Indian as a British subject." He promised within the pages of this publication to also "unhesitatingly point out" the shortcomings of Indians and "suggest means for [their] removal." He urged South African Indians to avail of their "unique opportunity of learning from...Englishmen [who] would evolve order out of chaos, and would make a garden in a wilderness."

The appeals to Indians to become a more engaged and altruistic citizenry in the face of increased repression by the colonial authorities continued and, in 1904, Gandhi urged more Indians to work "for the community," sink "individual differences in the face of common danger," and renounce "personal ease and personal gain" to strengthen the Indian community and improve its profile in the imperial esteem. Indians in South Africa had to "carry on a battle" against evils within their community and one surprising way Gandhi suggested they could do this was to emulate the European way of life including

[12] Foucault, "Technologies" 225

attending "parties, balls, and plays." Such a program of action was ostensibly intended to accelerate Indians' intermingling with the other races of the empire leading to a greater assimilation into the imperial system. Gandhi's regular harangue against Indians' lack of fine qualities continued and, in 1906, he accused Indians of being "indifferent, keep[ing their] houses dirty, hugging [their] hoarded wealth...liv[ing] a wretched life."

The colonial authorities in South Africa were little impressed by Gandhi's limited success in calling the Indian community to a conformist engagement in public affairs and their racist and apartheid policies intensified. Gandhi, in 1907, responded by advising Indians to be self-reliant and autonomous as far as they could reminding them that there were "so many things which can be done through sheer self-help and without Government aid." He cautioned them that, as colonial subjects in an alien land they were a "handful of men, usually accounted as not particularly brave...crossing swords with a comparatively mighty Government with unrestricted power" and had to be "willing and ready to sacrifice commensurately with the result to be obtained." He was now calling a new citizen into being, one that would appreciate his precarious and difficult position vis-à-vis a hostile and unscrupulous establishment. By 1909, Gandhi had started a satyagraha campaign against the Transvaal Government and maintained that besides resisting injustices nonviolently, Indians would also, by participating in the campaign, "get training in a movement, learn to be resourceful and demonstrate that [they were] not cowards but men...a nation." In this struggle, moreover, "no one [was] to wait for a lead from others [or] to point to others in justification of one's own lapses." Satyagraha was, thus, primarily a school and training ground for a radically new and empowering

citizenship and, only if that citizenship were genuine and effective, would satyagraha also become a weapon for securing justice and redress of grievances.

In 1914, Gandhi returned to India for good and toured the country until 1918, growing increasingly distressed at the poverty, exploitation, and despair he encountered. In 1916, speaking at the Benares Hindu University, he asked educated Hindus who claimed secular and religious leadership "If even our temples are not models of roominess and cleanliness, what can our self-government be?" He criticized the "atmosphere of sycophancy and falsity" that pervaded the dealings of educated Indians with the colonial establishment and underscored the need for them to develop a new attitude and stance towards the colonial state and common Indians. In 1917, speaking at the Gujarat Political Conference attended by diverse nationalists, he chastised them for having their "gaze...fixed upon Government" and insisted that "Swaraj means managing our own affairs." He held out swadeshi (localism) as "the key to swaraj" and insisted that much of the degradation that Indians suffered under British rule was owing to their own diminished sense of self-worth:

> If we have no regard for our own language, if we feel aversion to cloth made in our country, if our dress repels us...if your food is distasteful to us, even our climate is not good enough, our people uncouth and unfit for our company, our civilization ugly and the foreign attractive, in short, if everything native is bad and everything foreign is pleasing to us, I do not know what swaraj can mean for us.

This call for a new citizenship, based on pride in local traditions and conditions, is a far cry from his earlier prescriptions in South Africa.

In 1918, speaking during a campaign to recruit Indian volunteers for the Great War that was still raging with no end in sight, he identified the main strength of the British being their enactment of a superlative citizenship: "the British people have the ability to rule...They have the art [of government], they have skill and foresight, shrewdness and wisdom. They know how to deal with people according to their deserts." This superior citizenship, argued Gandhi, and not their economic might or military prowess was the true basis for their empire on which the sun did not set. He recommended conscription in the Indian Army and service in the Great War as an opportunity to develop the virtues of good citizenship: "You will learn military discipline as you help the Empire, gain military experience and acquire the strength to defend yourselves...even fight the Empire, should it play foul."

However, the end of the Great War saw growing popular unrest and rising expectations from people who believed their participation in Britain's war had earned them the right to greater participation in their own governance and the improvement of their living conditions. Trying to manage the sporadic violence that kept erupting all over the country, Gandhi and other nationalist leaders urged the people "to keep patience" and, in 1919, addressing a meeting of untouchables, Gandhi even suggested that they should earn the new rights they were demanding by making "great efforts to remedy their own shortcomings." However, the strikes and riots continued unabated and later in 1919 Gandhi decided to channel the discontent of the masses into a Non-Cooperation Movement that, he hoped, would be nonviolent. He offered this nonviolent, introspective movement based on renunciation and non-cooperation with unjust and exploitative policies and practices as a way to remedy "our inveterate selfishness, our

inability to make sacrifices for the country, our dishonesty, our timidity, our hypocrisy and our ignorance." Thus, like the South African satyagraha campaigns, the Non-Cooperation Movement was also not just an instrumental campaign to secure greater justice and rights, but a self-purifying, reformative program that would make better citizens of Indians.

Speaking on the rights and duties of labor in Madras, in 1920, Gandhi called workers to become better citizens through involvement in local politics:

> it is necessary to understand your obligations to the nation to which you belong...find out the affairs of your country in the best manner you can...who are your governors, what are your duties in relation to them, what they can do to you and what you can do to them...it is your bounden duty to understand your responsibilities and your duties as citizens of this great land.

He outlined a civic responsibility for ordinary citizens, urging them to take on greater responsibility and initiative to render government transparent and accountable and thereby act as a check on the elite leadership. He advocated popular membership in political and social organizations calling ordinary people to "understand them and find your place in them." Unlike the Non-Cooperation Movement and other satyagraha campaigns that would necessitate strict obedience to orders of trained leaders, the constructive engagement in local politics and social service would have to be voluntarily and spontaneously entered into by proactive individuals who would not wait for directions from others. For example, in 1920, addressing the pressing demands of untouchables for rapid amelioration of their condition, Gandhi insisted that their quest for empowerment would necessitate "organized intelligent effort" and as there was "no

leader...[to] lead them to victory through non-cooperation" (and nonviolence) it was better for them "heartily to join the great national movement...[to throw] off the slavery of the present Government" as a first step. He warned them against seeking preferential treatment from the colonial government, saying that "looking to the English for help," they would "sink deeper into slavery." Instead, he recommended negotiation and compromise with other indigenous constituencies to work out mutually acceptable solutions separate from the colonial power. The basis of empowered and effective citizenship would have to be self-discipline and local cooperation.

Such a collaborative politics of negotiation and compromise would need vastly different citizens and leaders from those in existence. Gandhi pointed out that most people in public life "live like pebbles...cannot work as a team...lack the power to draw others...or be drawn to others...[except] out of blind faith." In 1920, speaking to students, he declared

> If what you want is to be my slaves, I have nothing to do with you...I do not want any help from such persons...If you are thinking of coming out in the hope of being able to stand with [my] strength...remain standing where you are...I have nothing to give you in the way of excitement...I want to give you quiet courage...if my voice is not the voice of your conscience...do not listen.

Citizens had to choose their leaders on the basis of their own convictions and better judgment and leaders would be held in check by an informed and discerning citizenry who would not follow them blindly on the basis of caste, religious, or other affiliations.

The Constitution of 1919 allowed Indians to form local self-governing bodies like village councils and municipalities and, by 1925 there were thousands of such bodies all

over the country. However, these new bodies were remarkably like their English-dominated predecessors and led to widespread disappointment and frustration. Calling for popular checks and balances on formal authorities, alien or indigenous, Gandhi insisted that "swaraj is to be attained by educating the masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority" whoever that authority might be or wherever it might be found. He also refused to use satyagraha as a coercive and intimidating bargaining tactic stating, in 1930, "I will be content if people stay at home but...will not tolerate their interfering in my work without fulfilling my conditions."

Fearful of a repetition of the violent fiasco that the Non-Cooperation had degenerated into a decade earlier, Gandhi began to promote constructive work in the local community as a better alternative platform for mass direct action. In 1932 he prescribed "solid and constructive programme contemplating an attack on all fronts...concentrated energy of thousands of men, women, boys and girls who are actuated by the loftiest of religious motives." Once again, stressing the pedagogical and disciplinary value of the constructive program as a site of citizenship training rather than a programmatic blueprint for social and economic reform, he "respectfully urge[d] those who do not appreciate the purely religious character of the movement to retire from it."

With the Constitution of 1935, Indians now were eligible to form governments at the provincial level. This led to the Congress and other modern nationalists becoming more concerned with the wheeling and dealing of power politics and a rise in the aggressive ambitions of indigenous vested interests. Gandhi tried to warn away ordinary Indians from becoming pawns in the power games of the imperial power and modern nationalists, asking them, in 1937, to "form organizations having regard to their

vocations and special circumstances" but leaving the Congress to "deal with political issues." He insisted that only a few suitably competent individuals should bother with formal politics and the vast majority enact an empowered and effective citizenship through direct action in their local communities. He maintained that he was "not enamoured of numbers" but was more desirous of "a few becoming saturated with the spirit of non-violence and disciplining themselves for the utmost suffering." The quality of the citizenry was much more valuable than its numerical strength and a small body of inspired and dedicated citizens offering exemplary guidance to all would be a greater catalyst of radical and permanent reform than a large, unreflective population that would be at the mercy of politicians and power-brokers.

In 1940, the provincial ministries resigned in protest of England dragging India into the second Great War without consulting the Congress. But politics in India had been transformed completely and for ever and the weakened British Empire showed signs of imminent collapse. In 1942, Gandhi cautioned ordinary Indians that their nationalist leaders had been part of the colonial establishment and were now poised to take it over and it was up to them to "resist all injustice, no matter how or by whom it is perpetrated." There was now an increased need for the citizenry to be informed, discerning, and activist, acting in their local communities where they could directly engage in decision-making and implementation and check the depredations of entrenched powers and vested interests.

By 1947, with British withdrawal announced, the law and order situation declined irreparably and Gandhi was preoccupied with attempts to keep the peace, traveling to villages and towns across North India trying to defuse tensions between Hindus and

Muslims. In a prayer meeting, he reminded the frustrated and impatient people that "the Ministers...too are upset and disturbed...have no experience of running a government...[and] have to work with limited resources." Aiming at calming passions and deflecting accusations he blamed both citizenry and leadership for the chaos: "people do not follow the instructions from their Government...even officials do not follow instructions...[and] become so arrogant that they think that...there is none to question them." He became increasingly dejected by the fact that he had "ceased to be useful for any purpose other than unity" as both ordinary people and nationalists showed increasing disregard for his advice and prescriptions. Towards the end of his life, in a prayer meeting, he lamented, "I am very much disturbed...my life has become a burden...I wonder why I am still here...when my word is...no longer...law." To a distracted population seeming everyday more a hysterical mob he declared, "If your minds are somewhere else, you are free to leave...without listening." It was only Gandhi's assassination in 1948 that brought an end to the genocidal violence that accompanied the Partition.

Gandhi's prescriptions for an empowered and effective citizenry that would make a better life for themselves—social, economic, political, and spiritual—combined religious and political dynamics. His was a search for a worthy praxis of living in the world while not losing oneself in it (a quest akin to that of several religious and political leaders throughout world history). His prescriptions were similar to those advanced in the Stoic tradition in which:

> askesis means not renunciation but the progressive consideration of self, or mastery over oneself, obtained not through the renunciation of reality, but through

> the acquisition and assimilation of truth. It has as its final aim not preparation for another reality but access to the reality of this world.[13]

The askesis that Gandhi called for was, similarly, not a renunciation of the world per se, but the renunciation of those aspects of worldly existence (almost synonymous with the signature elements of modernity) that focus on materialistic and transient concerns and ignore the pursuit of self-actualization in the context of a humane and just community. National reconstruction, via Gandhi's prescriptions, had to begin in millions of individual citizens and be enacted in their thousands of local communities for it to be genuine and enduring.

Gandhi calls into being a citizen who is a rational-critical actor even if he rarely engages in rational-critical discourse but relies on other direct rational-critical interventions within his local community through the twin enterprises of satyagraha (nonviolent activism in the pursuit of justice) and the constructive program (the pursuit of general welfare through cooperative social service). Thus the citizen also has to be cultivate a strong sense of "kairos—the right time, the time at which a krisis provokes a radical change or choice," always trying to decide whether it is the time for nonviolent protest or steadfast service.[14] The constructive program was the best school for the development of these competencies and abilities that the new citizen would require as it was the only platform on which millions of common Indians could participate in the reconstruction of their selves, their families, their communities, and, ultimately, their nation.

---

[13] Foucault, "Technologies" 238-9
[14] Salazar 15

Transforming Politics and Leaders

The most important dimension of Gandhi's efforts to transform the politics of colonial India was his relations with the leadership of the many parties engaged in the nationalist movement (especially the Congress), with volunteer workers (in his satyagraha campaigns and constructive program) whom he wanted to fashion into the new and radically unconventional leadership of post-independence India, and with educated Indians who wielded power as professionals and bureaucrats. In his dealings with these two vital constituencies, Gandhi arrogated to himself the role of parrhesiastes or truth-teller. Gandhi placed the onus of India's regeneration and reorientation upon educated and relatively privileged Indians, particularly those who were members in the various nationalist parties of the independence movement and peopled the professions and civil service. Accordingly, he was blunt and unrelenting in pointing out their shortcomings and mistakes as well as offering advice and encouragement and set himself up in a paternalistic relation vis-à-vis the various partisan nationalists, educated Indians, and local volunteer workers who were not affiliated to any particular political party but wanted to play a prominent role in public affairs.

David Novak states that "Parrhesia begins with the courageous task of self-reflection and self-criticism and lives in people's ability to speak their minds in the faces of those who disagree with what they know to be true."[15] Such speech was the hallmark of Gandhi's relations with nationalists of all hues, but particularly with Congressmen whom he regarded as the inevitable heirs of independent India. Such a mode of speech also marked the thousands that flocked to him and his ashrams seeking a role in his

[15] Novak 41

movement of activism against the foreign power and vested interests and the empowerment and regeneration of the common people and colored his relationship with these two crucial constituencies. At times a source of inspiration and support and at others (more often than not) their embarrassing and unsolicited conscience-keeper, Gandhi remained a significant influence on aspiring leaders all over the subcontinent throughout his public career and acted as a constraint on the kind of leadership they were able to exercise that could not be ignored.

As early as 1905, when addressing the leaders of the Indian community in South Africa, Gandhi recommended that aspiring leaders ought to regard themselves as "public servants" and be willing to commit to a life of "simplicity and manual labor." He started Phoenix ashram in Johannesburg modeled on a Trappist monastery and intended it to serve as a seminary for leaders who would be trained to work with the masses within their local communities, rather than become cogs in a vast, bureaucratic, partisan machine that would compete in the power struggles of modern representative democracy. Adopting brahmacharya (celibacy) at age 37, he recommended it to volunteer workers as a prerequisite to complete dedication to a life of public service. He declared that their first task would be to serve as a "missionary in hygiene and sanitation" in the community that they would adopt. This was a call to a very different kind of leadership from the convention notion of a distant and privileged consultant and emphasized the need for a mundane, banal leadership not one that called for sporadic heroism.

In 1907, he reminded the workers that leaders in his movement could have to abandon all notions of elitism and entitlement and would have to consider themselves the "servants of India...the trustees of the Indian people." So far, he observed, "the moral

energy needed to achieve...a united and independent India was wanting" among them. While prosecuting a satyagraha campaign against the Transvaal Government, in 1909, he insisted that volunteers, in order to be considered eligible for leadership, had to cultivate "six forms of wealth" that included "Freedom from addiction to harmful things...A well-disciplined body...Disregard for comfortable seat or bed...Extreme simplicity in food habits...Total freedom from false sense of prestige or status...Fortitude." Here, again, we see Gandhi's predilection for pursuing abstract ideals and principles by translating them into values, attitudes, and behaviors that had to be embodied at the level of the individual working with the local community.

On his return to India for good in 1914, one of the first things he did (while touring the subcontinent to familiarize himself with the life of ordinary Indians firsthand) was to set up an ashram in May 1915. This was modeled on the Phoenix settlement and was a training institute in which volunteer workers could "learn how to serve the motherland one's whole life." In 1916, he rebuked educated Indians for erecting barriers between themselves and the ordinary masses:

> you have received your education through a foreign tongue...[and] therefore do not react upon the masses...they recognize us not much more than they recognize the English officers...Their aspirations are not ours...And you witness not in reality failure to organize, but want of correspondence between the representatives and the represented.

He emphasized the need for a concrete politics of village regeneration, insisting that leaders had to act as doers, movers, and shakers, and not distant puppeteers or debaters of

abstract topics in exclusive forums and in an alien language. Addressing various political parties at the 1917 Gujarat Political Conference, he asked:

> If we cannot regulate the affairs of our cities, if our streets are not kept clean, if our homes are dilapidated and if our roads are crooked, if we cannot command the services of selfless citizens for civic government and those who are in charge of affairs are neglectful or selfish, how shall we claim larger powers?

Leadership was not about jockeying for positions of power and pandering to vested interests while manipulating the masses with promises and threats, but about changing the lives of ordinary Indians for the better through mundane improvements.

Speaking, in 1917, to the All-India Social Service Conference in Calcutta, he asked the delegates to "revert to your vernaculars...study rural conditions...and draw up a course of instructions for the guidance of workers and of the people at large...restore to their proper status a fifth of the total population [untouchables]" and ensure that women "play their full part in the plan of regeneration." In 1918, he also called upon women to claim a larger role in the movement of national regeneration (if not formal politics) saying, "spare as much time as you can to visit the most backward localities...and give the women there what you have yourselves received"

By 1919, Gandhi was considering launching the Non-Cooperation Movement to protest oppressive legislation but cautioned volunteer workers that only those who were "seasoned, disciplined and capable of handling delicately organized movements" should volunteer to act as local agents to direct popular participation and that they should "select such laws only as can be disobeyed individually" and did not require large-scale

coordination and supervision. On the other hand, he dismissed the need for strict hierarchy and particular partisan affiliation, declaring:

> Everyone should know the duty he owes, should ask himself what, having been born in India, he ought to do for her and how. What, having been born in Bombay, did he owe to her? To what end was he a satyagrahi? What was his duty as one? And so on.

He insisted that India needed leaders "whose sole qualification needs to be perfect honesty and love of the country" and that the freedom movement did not need "long speeches or legislative assemblies or laws...[but] only a few sincere and willing workers...[who] by their own exemplary conduct and spirit of service [would] bring about the necessary transformation in every village."

In 1920, evincing a shortage of such a discerning leadership at the local level, and a consequent disregard of the principles of orderly and nonviolent resistance, Gandhi stated that with only "a few intelligent, sincere, local workers...and the whole nation [could] be organized to act intelligently, and democracy...evolved out of mobocracy." He charged volunteer workers with making "little attempt to understand and influence the masses and least of all the most turbulent among them" and reminded them that they were dealing with a particularly difficult populace, an "expectant and believing people groaning under misery and insult" and their leadership efforts had to meet the challenges of dealing with such a population with patience, foresight, and firmness. He also lashed out at Congressmen for failing "these 35 years to...permeate the masses" while all they did was "sit upon the pedestal and from there deliver harangues to them in a language they do not understand." He also made a distinction between volunteer workers—who

participated in satyagraha campaigns and had a restricted and sporadic role to play only at time of crisis—and volunteer workers engaged in the positive, constructive aspect of the nationalist movement (although individuals could serve as both, if able and willing). In 1921, he addressed ashram inmates, calling them his "reserve force" and telling them that he did not wish to "use them for winning independence and fighting the British" as their role in public affairs would "arise after independence." In the meanwhile, they had to ready themselves for that strenuous and endless challenged by pursuing "a long penance, doing constructive work."

In 1921, after several violent incidents, Gandhi called off the Non-Cooperation Movement and lamented the widespread "want of forethought, management and organization." He charged workers with not being "disciplined to handle mass movements in a sober and methodical manner" and stated that a more rigorous training of volunteers workers was needed. He was also critical of the substandard efforts of Congressmen, declaring that "full swaraj" would be attainable only when "the Congress commands complete confidence and willing obedience to its instructions" among its party members and the population it claimed to represent and lead. In 1922, he maintained that "No institution is worth keeping that does not command local support by reason of its own moral strength" and urged Congressmen to "recognize that there is a great difference between power and swaraj." He charged them with, thus far, "fighting merely for power and authority" and urged them to "abandon defensive civil disobedience and concentrate all energy on the tasteless but health-giving economic and social reform" under the aegis of his constructive program.

In 1924, he addressed the newly formed local self-governing bodies comprised entirely of Indians and commented on the poverty of their performance at using their newfound power and resources to serve the people better. He charged that their politics was inadequate and ineffective because they had "only played at it...neither sacrificed ease, nor time, much less money at all commensurate with the work required." He reminded them that he could not micromanage an enterprise as vast and complex as the constructive program as it was "difficult to pass on decisions from moment to moment and from day to day" in a program in which "action must vary with every varying circumstance." He urged Congressmen and volunteer workers to "find out the lowest common measure...[and] co-operate on the Congress platform for achieving that common measure." He insisted that any leadership claiming to be democratic had to "progressively represent the masses...[who] have no political consciousness" and to do this they would have to "come in living touch with them...share their sorrows, understand their difficulties and anticipate their wants" rather than just issue directives and make promises from their offices. If the Congress did nothing else, declared Gandhi, they ought to "simply unite to make the...constructive programme a success."

The growing and open criticism (delivered in public speeches and published in newspapers) of the Congress, alarmed many of its members, especially prominent figures in the party's leadership who counted on Gandhi as a friend, confidant, and colleague. Gandhi assured them, in 1925, that he did not wish to defame them nor did he "wish violently to wrest the Congress from educated India" but urged them to "grow to the new thought" of what leadership in India ought to be and to replace their elitist politicking with "an intensive active programme out of a 'harmless toy' like the spinning-wheel." In

1926, he lectured Congressmen on their inability to outfox the British on their own terms in formal politics, stating "You cannot overreach the British by the glibness of your tongue or the power of your pen." However, invoking his many years of personal contact with Englishmen in India, England, and South Africa, he argued that the British "understand and respect patience, perseverance, determination and capacity for organization" and suggested that Congressmen cultivate these virtues in their attempt to become recognized as the genuine and legitimate representatives of the Indian peoples—a claim the British consistently and vehemently denied to concede. Emphasizing the local community as the best strategic site for political action, Gandhi insisted that "all those who raise the moral tone of the community as a whole, all those who find occupation for the idle millions, are the real builders of swaraj."

In 1927, Gandhi urged the Congress to initiate experimental programs of direct action among the local communities all over the subcontinent rather than engage in fruitless discussions of abstract political concepts. He advocated the "exploration...in the direction of determining not the definition of an indefinable term like swaraj but in discovering the ways and means" to achieve it. He rebuked Congressmen who had been elected to village councils and municipalities for failing to "understand the responsibility attached to the[ir] office" and to act as "trustee and custodian of public health and public morals." He observed that "politics had degenerated into a sort of game for leisure hours" and pointed out that it was merely "a pleasurable pastime...to strive against the powers that be, and to wrestle with the government of the day, especially when that government happens to be a foreign government." Their real duty was to use their

offices, powers, and resources to improve the lot of the people within their jurisdiction and to expect no reward for doing so.

Through 1928, he continued to decry the lack of honesty, sincerity, and integrity in the new elected bodies and in the Congress at large, maintaining that the condition of the ordinary people could never improve as long as "we cannot trust our brothers and sisters, our parents, and party leaders, when we cannot trust anybody, when we have no sense of honour, when we cannot allow our words to remain unaltered for 24 hours." In 1929, in a scathing and frank assessment, he scolded volunteer workers in the various volunteer associations formed to promote different elements of the constructive program (like textiles, education, etc.) saying "your capacity to observe rules is small...simplicity is comparatively little...devotion is almost insignificant, and...determination and concentration show themselves only in the beginning." He also discerned "too much wrangling, too much jealousy, too much wire-pulling and too much self-seeking in these bodies to enable honest workers to hold out for long" and warned that the constructive program and the regeneration of the country were doomed if these ills were not addressed and turned around.

In 1929, he also identified the need for voluntary organizations and volunteer workers to decentralize and spread out across the country. He suggested that "every province should have volunteer training centers as also textbooks." Addressing students, he urged them to "reconstruct their life and pass every day of their vacation in the villages surrounding their colleges or high schools...settling down in villages...find an unlimited scope for service, research and true knowledge." This would serve as a vital complement to their formal education and enable them to become true leaders of their

less fortunate compatriots than their limited and distorted state-sponsored education could ever hope to.

In 1930, when all the elected (Indian-dominated) village councils and municipalities had collapsed due to the interference and lack of cooperation from their English superiors higher up the administrative hierarchy, Gandhi called upon Congressmen and volunteer workers everywhere to "arrange a programme of work according to their capacity so that, men, women and children, all might participate to some extent" rather than "look up for everything to the Government." He warned Congressmen against "making thoughtless promises and raising false hopes which may never be realized...by the mere fact of India gaining independence" and assured them that the only way they would make any progress in gaining the confidence and support of the masses and becoming their true representatives was by working with local leaders within local communities rather than by trying to formulate vast plans and programs to be formulated and directed from some remote capital. In 1931, he appealed for the recruitment of enough volunteer workers to "cover seven [hundred thousand] villages...one worker for every ten villages...seventy thousand men and women volunteers to cover all the villages in the country" and that would be the best framework within which the regeneration of the country—apart from the formal political system—could be accomplished.

Dismayed at the poor performance of Congressmen and volunteer workers engaged in relief work in the aftermath of the devastating 1934 Bihar earthquake, Gandhi chastised them saying "the masses have not received the full message of satyagraha owing to its adulteration in the process of transmission." He called for volunteer workers

who would be "spiritual instruments" and who would "learn the art and beauty of self-denial and voluntary poverty...and generally...cultivate personal purity" as a prerequisite for dedicated and effective leadership. In 1935, he continued to lament the presence of only "a handful of earnest reformers scattered all over the country...[un]able to raise funds locally...[and un]sure of the policy to be followed." He warned volunteer workers that a "slightest error or judgment, a hasty action or a hasty word may put back the hands of the clock of progress" and advised them that the constructive program had to be prosecuted patiently and creatively with their efforts "cautiously evolved in the light of experience daily gained." He reminded them that the Indian people were a brutalized populace that "have lost all hope...[and] suspect that every stranger's hand is at their throats...only to exploit them." In order to lead such a people, they would have to "establish a personal touch...befriend them, know their wants and help them." He declared that the "question ultimately" was one of whether there were "workers enough of the requisite purity, self-sacrifice, industry and intelligence" to undertake this vast and challenging task, one by one, village by village, insisting that "even one pure soul can save a whole village." The pressing need was not for a large army of automatons executing orders from a remote central authority, but 70,000 dedicated individuals willing to undertake the challenge outlined above—ostensibly not a tall order in a population more than 300 million strong.

In 1937, weary of the throngs that beset him at his ashram, seeking consultancy for the most trivial of details, Gandhi urged only those volunteers to join his movement who were able and willing to "make the whole of India [their] field of activity." He vehemently opposed any practices that might allow his movement to "degenerate into a

sect" and suggested that "it would be proper to cremate all [his] writings with [his] body." In 1939, speaking to volunteer workers still pressing for a satyagraha campaign instead of pressing on with the laborious task of prosecuting the constructive program, Gandhi declared, "If I cannot carry you forward along my own lines...I am unfit to lead...Discard me or have me on my terms."

In 1939, the Provincial Ministries (manned mainly by Congressmen) that had been elected after the Constitution of 1935 resigned to protest India being dragged into the second Great War unceremoniously and without being consulted. Gandhi challenged this newly unemployed Congress, tongue-in-cheek, to organize

> A conference, formal or informal, between all Congress groups...to consider the question whether time has not come to revise the policy of non-violence and the consequent constructive programme, and to find out and frame a programme in consonance with and answering the present temper of Congressmen.

He urged "every Congressman to carry on a fierce search inward and deal with the central problem" of what direction the leadership of the country should take at this crucial juncture and warned them that it was "not safe or dignified for the Congress to follow the policy of drift...a house divided against itself." Gandhi now placed the onus on Congress to formulate a framework of action that would replace his vastly unpopular constructive program—a challenge he knew full well the Congress was not equal to.

In 1940, pressed by Congress and popular demand to initiate yet another satyagraha campaign to pressure a Britain already preoccupied with the second Great War to draw up a firm plan of withdrawal, Gandhi refused, maintaining that such a plan of action could only be undertaken under stringent conditions that the Congress and

volunteer worker had never demonstrated a capacity for. Again, tongue-in-cheek, he suggested two feasible alternatives: prosecuting the constructive program wholeheartedly as a way of preparing for the more difficult task of engaging in satyagraha, or engaging in satyagraha on an individual basis, without a central, overarching organization of efforts.

> The solitary satyagrahi has to examine himself. If he has universal love and if he fulfils the conditions implicit in such a state, it must find its expression in his daily conduct. He would be bound with the poorest in the village by ties of service. He would constitute himself the scavenger, the nurse, the arbitrator of disputes, and the teacher of the children of the village. Everyone, young and old, would know him; though a householder he would be leading a life of restraint; he would make no distinction between his and his neighbour's children; he would own nothing but would hold what wealth he has in trust for others, and would therefore spend out of it just sufficient for his barest needs. His needs would, as far as possible, approximate to those of the poor, he would harbour no untouchability, and would therefore inspire people of all castes and creeds to approach him with confidence.

It was obvious, with such a demanding description of the solitary satyagrahi, that the constructive program would be the more feasible alternative for the vast majority of Congressmen and volunteer workers.

In 1941, conceding to public demand, Gandhi published the pamphlet, Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place, to provide volunteer workers, educated Indians, and Congressmen with a single document in which the elements of the constructive program were compiled as a list rather than within a compelling narrative

with a dramatistic framework like his satyagraha campaigns and his first major pamphlet, Hind Swaraj (1909). Simultaneously, however, Gandhi noted that there was "a marked deterioration in enthusiasm" for constructive work. "Fewer people [were] coming forward now than before...there [was] no discipline among many satyagrahis...[and] there [was] no life left in the Congress." In 1942, he insisted that the framework constituted by the constructive program alone could serve as the basis of a legitimate, responsible, democratic government—not a modern representative democracy on the western pattern—as the elements of the constructive program alone constituted "common ground between the rulers and the people" and could hope to sustain and enrich their relationship so vital to a genuine and lasting nationhood.

In 1944, Gandhi suddenly reversed his long-standing directive that volunteer workers engaged in constructive work should stay away from formal politics and involvement in the Congress when he charged the All India Spinning Association with not having "won the confidence of Congressmen sufficiently." He ordered them to undertake the regeneration of the handmade textile industry "from a new angle" and to formulate "a new order of priorities." He also noted that other volunteer workers had "not yet reached the seven hundred thousand villages." In 1945, putting out a new edition of Constructive Programme (with a few changes and inclusions), Gandhi regretted that he could not offer "any further guidance" as he had "no strength to get into details." Declaring that he was not able (as volunteer workers were demanding) to develop a district-level model for organizing the constructive program—it was "too big a bite"—he would try to "successfully organize work in one village...[to] serve as a model for the rest." He acknowledged the need for a more formal system of training volunteer workers

to become effective catalysts of radical reform in villages and suggested the setting up of new ashrams to teach/learn "institutional ethics...the art of collective living by effacing oneself completely in dedicated service." He also acknowledged the need for "a central body of honest experts" to enhance the effectiveness and expertise of volunteer workers as "committees or even agents can show no results unless they are experts who know their work."

By 1946, the British officially declared their intention to withdraw from India and the Congress and other political parties started gearing up for the negotiations that would precede the transition and the elections that would follow it. Reluctantly conceding that some Congressmen and other nationalists would have to engage in the deplorable business of formal politics, Gandhi urged them to use their positions and powers mainly to "expose the Government...prevent undesirable legislation and bring in laws which are useful for the public...[and ensure] as much help as possible is given to the constructive programme." Once again, he tried to reduce the clamor for formal positions of power by declaring that a Congressman should consider continued engagement in formal politics only if he was a "modern Hercules who [could]...take up parliamentary work, constructive work as distinguished from the parliamentary and the organization work of the Congress, in addition to working for [his] own livelihood"—a very tall order!

With the announcement of imminent British withdrawal came communal rioting across northern India and a growing breakdown in law and order. Even before that Gandhi had to abandon his promise to create a "model village" and became preoccupied with trying to defuse the tension and mounting violence. In 1947, he called for volunteer workers to "Work singly, courageously, intelligently with all local help...and, if you do

not succeed, blame only yourselves and no one else and nothing else." He noted that volunteer workers, educated Indians, and even Congressmen were victims of "the distraction caused by conflicting advice by different leaders" and asked them to "make their selection...when the advice of the leader appealed to their heart and head."

He warned nationalists involved in the formal transfer of power and the formation of the new postcolonial state that sooner or later ordinary Indians would demand "an account of [their] own work" and reminded them that their "duties [had] now become ten times heavier" than before. He also advised them to continue to regard the constructive program as the definitive framework for national reconstruction and to take necessary steps to ensure that it would be "reduced to practice by the millions of India" under the guidance of "thousands of workers." In late 1947, he urged volunteer workers within the various voluntary organizations to "come together and...work under the direction of a jointly chosen representative...set their own house in order...[give] a good account of themselves, [and] work unitedly and in co-operation" with one another and with the Congress. Experienced volunteer workers would now have to become the "research laboratories in their respective fields...specialists...to tender to Congress...advice on what needs to be done." In 1948, shortly before his assassination, he pointed out that in his public career he had "only opened to view the distant scene" and could be expected to do no more owing to the paucity of "time and health." The responsibility for regenerating the new nation lay on her leaders, "the servants of the nation" who would have to consider what they could "do to raise themselves in the estimation of their masters"—the ordinary people of India.

Judith Brown argues that Gandhi "was aiming far more for the moral awakening and deepening of insight among the powerful and the oppressors than among the weak and deprived."[16] The above account of Gandhi's utterances to powerful Indians seems to support such a claim. But he was also trying to get common Indians to rethink their identities as citizens in vastly different ways than they were used to and identified new arenas and forums for them to enter into and prescribed new forms of direct, participatory action. In doing so, he was addressing not only the powerful and the oppressors but any and all Indians who were willing to take up the responsibilities of public service and to help the weak and deprived who were too powerless and degraded to improve their own lot. While Gandhi was "definitely not attempting to organize movements for the pursuit of 'rights' or the forcible reordering of the distribution of power and resources," he was attempting to foment revolution—nonviolent and non-coercive—working at the level of individuals in their respective communities.

Novak reminds us that "while Parrhesia is fearless speech, it can also be dangerous speech" as it has the potential to antagonize powerful interests and, under the uncomfortable and unrelenting glare of the truth, even friends and allies can be alienated and turn into hostile opponents.[17] At the same time, Novak maintains that "parrhesia should be a quality emulated by...speakers and demanded by those who listen...[as it offers] reflection, criticism, hope, and truth," vital resources for the sustenance and health of any democratic and just society.[18] Gandhi's parrhesia did, indeed, prove to be dangerous. He was assassinated by a high-caste, Hindu fundamentalist, one of the

---

[16] "Gandhi and Human Rights" 97
[17] Novak 41
[18] Novak 41

millions of educated Indians he tried to goad into a more altruistic consciousness and a more devoted service to their less fortunate compatriots. Several speakers after Gandhi have continued the parrhesiatic scrutiny and critique of Indian politics, economics, society, and spirituality, (although perhaps not so vehemently and comprehensively as he did) and so the truths about India are still being spoken out loud by various individuals and organizations across the country and the hope that India's shortcomings and inadequacies will be addressed remains alive even if not very vibrant.

Reconfiguring the Public Sphere

Gandhi eventually rejected the modern conception of the public sphere as a space for rational-critical deliberation and decision-making in which participation was reserved for a few. He did use the print medium—one of the components of the modern public sphere—but only for the limited purpose of keeping in touch with nationalists and volunteer workers all over the country. Throughout his public career, he sought to involve the millions of "dumb" Indians in the enterprise of regenerating themselves, their local communities, and, by extension, their nation. Olson and Goodnight identify the local community as a site where "vernacular discourse is challenged to absorb, translate, and transform [global] tensions into enactments that...strengthen rather than weaken a particular civic culture."[19] Gandhi insisted that any beneficial and lasting regeneration of India's millions would have to involve them directly (and not merely through the good offices of representatives, elected or otherwise). He focused on the local community as the optimal site for intervention, the space where ordinary Indians, all over the

[19] Olson and Goodnight 57-8

subcontinent, could unite to resist injustice and promote their own welfare without throwing themselves upon the mercy of remote powers and vested interests.

In 1906, very much in step with the terms of Pax Britannica, Gandhi visited England to represent the interests of Indians in South Africa. He tried to demarcate common ground on which the imperial government and all its subjects could meet and negotiate mutually advantageous arrangements. This delegation and another, in 1909, failed and a disillusioned Gandhi began to seek an alternative mode of political action. By 1911, he directed a new political strategy of nonviolent political confrontation against the Transvaal Government—satyagraha. He successfully demonstrated that "neither big associations with their ostentatious ways of doing things, nor societies nor meetings" could ever be more effective than the disciplined and concerted "direct action" of ordinary people in securing justice and autonomy for themselves.

After returning to India in 1914, and spending the next four years touring the country to acquaint himself first-hand with the conditions of ordinary Indians across the subcontinent, Gandhi started a publication, Navajivan (a Gujarati periodical that would later appear in several other vernacular languages), on July 1, 1919. In the augural issue he stated:

> I think I have a service to render to India by delivering a message to her. Some ideas I have come by as a result of my thinking are such as will advance us towards our welfare. It has ever been my endeavour to explain these. I have not succeeded as well as I should have liked to for want of ability or time or favourable circumstances...One powerful modern means for this purpose is the newspaper.

Gandhi decided once again (in South Africa he had published Indian Opinion) to use the print medium as a public space to build a common vocabulary and engage in dialogue with modern nationalists and educated Indians—people like himself—to search for ways and means to communicate and identify with the illiterate and oppressed millions to evolve a new nationhood and citizenship that would be regenerative for all. In 1919, he also started Young India (an English-language periodical) and urged the nationalists to shed "much fuss, all too many pompous speeches, petitions and resolutions and much scheming" and engage in direct action initiatives that could serve as platforms to include, channel, and direct the discontent and energies of the masses.

In late 1919, he hit upon an idea for a common platform of direct action that would engage Indians across all demographic divisions and the social hierarchy. He proposed a Non-Cooperation Movement that would comprise "progressive four stages": the indigenous elite collaborators in the British government would start by "giving up of titles and resignation of honorary posts," professionals and bureaucrats would engage in mass resignation from "Government service," the main staff of British rule—the police and the military—would also engage in mass "withdrawal" and, finally, Indians everywhere would initiate the "suspension of taxes."

By 1921, it was obvious that the vast majority of Indians was not disciplined and committed enough to work the program of non-cooperation to Gandhi's strict standards of nonviolence. Gandhi suspended the program and insisted that the first step the nation had to take was to rid itself of "its superfluities, its questionable habits, and its vices." Indians, he declared, were not just fighting for formal political independence, but were "engaged in a spiritual war" and were "not living in normal times." The nationalist

movement was not so much "to produce an effect on the British but to become, ourselves, pure, firm, courageous, and fearless." The spheres of the individual person, the community, and public morality were now part of the public sphere in which Indians had to engage in political action beginning with introspection, renunciation, and penance as preparation for satyagraha. In 1921, Gandhi also came up with the curious idea that the formal party machinery of the Congress could also serve as the framework for a new civil society. Such a conflation could serve to provide political education to the people, transform the Congress into a mass movement instead of a small, elite party, and dismiss the British charge that the Congress was not really representative of the Indian people. Gandhi set the goal that there "should not be a single village left without a Congress organization and no village register should be left without a single adult male or female on it."

By 1924, however, with the Congress more keen on electioneering for control of the local self-governing bodies that Indians were allowed to man as per the Constitution of 1919, Gandhi began promoting the constructive program as a better alternative to formal political participation to the mass of Indians. True nationalist leaders would serve the cause better "exclusively by working among the people and evoking its organizing and administrative capacity" and would, thus, "show that even the most ideal government plays among a self-governing people the least important part in national growth." Through the next decade Gandhi devoted the bulk of his efforts to formulating and promoting the various elements of the constructive program, especially the cottage textile industry.

By 1934, Gandhi reversed his 1920s campaign to expand the Congress machinery and membership and now tried to wrest away the majority of Congressmen to the public sphere framed by the constructive program; he also resigned as active member. Suggesting the adoption of a new manifesto for the Congress, Gandhi characterized "the powers of the legislatures" as being "too small for the effort which the nation must make for the realization of its goal of complete independence." He insisted that he was not resigning "in a huff" but only because he had the impression that Congress was "suppressed by [his] presence" and that he had "lost the power to persuade" Congressmen to adopt the constructive program as the best vehicle to achieve independence and regeneration.

In 1934, Gandhi also set about restructuring the constructive program and urged volunteer workers to form "district organizations [as] working centers" with the central office (his ashram) becoming "only a watch tower for the whole of India issuing instructions, but not a board of administration...a sort of correspondence school through which the various agents will carry on mutual exchange of thought and compare notes." He recommended that constructive workers "avoid centralization of administration" but promote "centralization of thought, ideas and scientific knowledge." In 1938, Gandhi suggested the formation of "local corps" in every village that would "not confine themselves merely to preparedness for emergencies, but for the daily walk of life in all its departments, personal, domestic, social, economic, political, religious." He apologized for not being able to "play any active part in the formation of these corps" as he had "not the health, energy or time for it." He would continue, however, to "guide and make suggestions through correspondence or columns" but insisted that "those who appreciate

the idea and feel they have the ability, will have to take the initiative themselves." The loss of Gandhi's charismatic leadership at this crucial stage was a decisive setback to the constructive program.

In 1940, Gandhi declared that the constructive program was the best framework within which nationalists and local leaders could work for the regeneration of their constituencies, communities, and the nation as it "provide[d] a non-political meeting ground for persons representing diverse schools of political opinion" wherein could be effected the "education both of the haves and the have-nots" in an "atmosphere of mutual respect and trust." This sounded like a rather naïve and idealistic recommendation as several of the elements of the constructive program (such as untouchability, women's empowerment, sanitation work) were explosively controversial and ran foul of powerful vested interests. Perhaps what Gandhi was trying to impress on nationalists, educated Indians, indigenous vested interests, local leaders, and ordinary Indians was the need for all of them to work together in spite of their differences if India was to be recreated and regenerated.

The constructive program, as initiated and outlined by Gandhi remained, however, unattractive to these powerful constituencies and as British withdrawal drew nearer, Gandhi was less and less able to cobble together a strong coalition that could continue the struggle to organize the new nation within the framework of the constructive program. Moreover, with little training, few resources, and no overarching organizational support, volunteer workers scattered across the subcontinent were often unequal to the task of building vibrant local communities in impoverished, brutalized, and remote rural areas. Many of the elements of the constructive program (for example,

the village council self-governing system—panchayati raj) were expropriated by the modern postcolonial nation-state (dominated by the Congress) and incorporated into the hierarchical, centralized, command political economy of the new republic.

Reformulating Civic Action

Early in his public career (while still in South Africa), after a couple of failed delegations to England in 1906 and 1909, Gandhi lost faith in the due process of the British Empire as well as "in articles and speeches [as] they called for no courage" and "deeds after all are better than words." In 1907, he observed that "Under British rule, justice is often not to be had without some show of strength, whether of the pen, of the sword, or of money." What was needed was "direct action" on the part of the millions without recourse to the party politics and institutional maze that were inaccessible to most Indians.

Gandhi came to promote civic action for the majority of Indians in the form of personal discipline and local engagement with formal politics left only to a small minority. Three ideographs dominated his recommendations for civic action: experimentation, autonomy, and sarvodaya (the welfare of all). Such a politics had to be instantiated by leaders who identified with small, local communities, and these leaders would have to find arguments, appeals, and plans of action from within these communities and their temporal and material contexts. Such a program could not proceed on the basis of a universally applicable programmatic formula with preconceived goals, readymade means, and a hierarchical chain of command. Congressmen and other nationalists were unwilling to participate in such a constrained politics and continued to pursue the "big tent" politics of modern representative democracy.

As early as 1908, during the Transvaal campaign, Gandhi noted the need for nationalists and leaders to go beyond the stage of empowerment and mobilization (that satyagraha afforded) that had only "prepared the ground" and decide "what kind of a building to construct and how." This was the more challenging and crucial task before the nationalist and local leaders. Moreover, satyagraha was a strategy to be wielded "not only against a Government but against society as well." Thus civic action necessitated a new citizenry that would exercise eternal vigilance and take total responsibility for their own autonomy and welfare. In 1911, Gandhi took stock of the benefits that satyagraha as civic action had brought to South African Indians thus far:

> public opinion has been roused all over India...the entire world has learnt of our struggle and...admired the Indians' courage...the enactment of further thoughtless legislation in the Transvaal has been prevented...we have won the sympathy of many whites...the prestige of the Indian community has risen...the Government realizes that we are invincible...and the Indian community, once timorous, has now become brave.

But now these gains had to be translated into further constructive gains—the rebuilding of impoverished and degraded individuals and communities and, thereby, the nation at large.

Speaking to Europeans and Indian Christians at a Missionary Conference in Madras in 1916, Gandhi outlined the principle of swadeshi as the major platform of civic action that ordinary Indians everywhere could engage in without much organization and extraordinary effort. He defined swadeshi as

> that spirit in us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate

> surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote...In the domain of politics...use of the indigenous institutions...In that of economics...use only things at are produced by...immediate neighbours.

Simply abandoning the grand structures, programs, and practices of the alien power and its indigenous collaborators would free millions of Indians from their power and exploitation, weaken the establishment, and make their continued hegemony undesirable.

In 1919, on the eve of the Non-Cooperation Movement, Gandhi cautioned the people not to lay too much store by satyagraha as it was only a tactic to be used sparingly within a much larger strategy of regeneration that involved constructive work for the most part. He advised Congressmen and volunteer workers to "select laws whose civil breach would constitute an education for the people, showing them a clear way out of the difficulties that lie in the path of honest men desiring to do public work." He also reminded them that satyagraha "is being brought into play on a large scale on the political field for the first time, it is in an experimental stage" and that even he was "ever making new discoveries." He declared, "He to whom satyagraha means nothing more than civil disobedience has never understood satyagraha...Only he who thoroughly knows how to construct may destroy."

By 1921, Gandhi called of the Non-Cooperation Movement as it degenerated into widespread mob violence and for the next decade promoted the constructive program as the best way to achieve a radical revolution. It was to be practiced at the level of lived experience by millions of ordinary Indians all over and would serve as the basic framework whereby a new society, economy, politics, and spirituality could be evolved through the transformation of identities, relationships, practices, and behaviors. Gandhi

insisted that if the elements of the constructive program "could but absorb national energy, [they] would bring about all the reforms that the most ardent extremists can ever desire." Gandhi selected the restoration of the textile industry (a vast, mechanized, urban industry in the early twentieth century) to its pre-modern entity as a cottage industry diffused all over rural India (providing employment to millions) as the flagship and pilot project of the constructive program. He assured ordinary Indians:

> if we refuse to wear or use foreign cloth and be satisfied with the simple cloth that we can produce in our homes, it will be proof of our organizing ability, energy, co-operation and self-sacrifice that will enable us to secure all we need...[and] a striking demonstration of national solidarity.

With such a gigantic enterprise meticulously executed in the 700,000 villages of India, the very fabric of the country would be rewoven and India would be regenerated without recourse to violent struggle and coercive politics.

In 1920, Gandhi advised Indians to pay close attention to all affairs that concerned their lives and that of their communities and, especially, to actions of the British government. He urged them to "meet [British] craftiness by simplicity and openness, godlessness by godliness, untruthfulness by truthfulness" and "match its courage with greater ability, sacrifice with greater self-sacrifice, and its organizing powers with greater organizing powers," failing which Indians "must be content to occupy a status of servility." This abstract injunction is uncharacteristic of Gandhi's usually mundane and specific utterances, but Gandhi was warning Indians that they needed to pay close attention to how power impinged upon their day-to-day lives and formulate suitable responses as well as counter-initiatives as individuals and members of a community.

After the debacle of the Non-Cooperation Movement, Gandhi declared that Indians were not "ripe" for civil disobedience; and it was necessary to shun the "anarchy of the mob" as well as "the anarchy of the [British] Government" for the time being. The acquisition of true freedom would depend upon Indians' ability to cultivate "honesty, unity, firmness, organizing power, capacity to build up national trade, countrywide spirit of patriotism, indomitable courage and spirit of self-sacrifice." This moral and spiritual regeneration could be attained only through the prosecution of the various elements of the constructive program within the sphere of the local community. Indians could help regenerate the country by putting themselves, their homes, and their villages in order. In 1922, Gandhi began to promote the constructive program as a prerequisite for satyagraha. He maintained that "intensifying constructive and productive activities" would enable the masses to build up "strength for civil disobedience." This was an enterprise in which anyone could participate without prior training (unlike satyagraha) as there was "enough work and enough variety for every real worker." Moreover, he declared, constructive work "will steady and calm us...wake our organizing spirit...make us industrious...render us fit for swaraj...cool our blood." The constructive program, as civic participation, was not just an instrumental scheme to achieve material goals, but also a therapeutic and spiritually regenerating exercise for the individual and the group.

With the Congress becoming preoccupied with electioneering and local self-governance after the adoption of the Constitution of 1919, Gandhi declared, in 1925, that "every effort that might be made in the Legislative Councils...will be perfectly fruitless" if they were not accompanied by "construction on a mass scale" that alone could result in "a quickening of the national life." He maintained that true independence would

necessarily be "the natural and inevitable result of businesslike habits...of co-operation among our own ranks, of exacting discipline and obedience, and of sustained energy and willing, well-meant calculated sacrifice...of co-operative industry on the part of the whole nation...of an enlightened awakening amongst the masses of India."

In 1925, promoting spinning and weaving as national occupations, Gandhi explained that they would not only regenerate the rural economy, but would, more importantly, produce "the spinning atmosphere" as when "many people do a particular thing, it produces a subtle unperceivable effect which pervades the surroundings and proves infectious." Spinning and weaving by the masses would be imbued with a mystical power to build community, as "idle hands...will be irresistibly drawn to the wheel." The entire nation could "Spin, spin, spin, till stagnation vanishes." Responding to criticism of the utopian nature of this recommendation, Gandhi replied that it would have to "hold the field till another or an alternative remedy is suggested and a case made out for it." Any occupation, for that matter, had the capacity to "unite and vitalize the whole nation" if it were organized into "a common industry which all can carry on entirely by themselves." He also noted that "absorption in common constructive work can keep down the violence of the explosion" of formal politics and "further cement the union when it comes."

In 1926, Gandhi continued to promote spinning as a way to cope with the "distresses, dissensions, and defeats and consequent dejection" of formal politics and the slow progress of the nationalist movement. He stated "through it I establish an indissoluble bond between the lowliest in the land and myself...adding something to the desirable wealth of the country...and inviting the poorest in the land to labour for their

living rather than beg for it." Thus nationwide constructive work could serve as a new, sincere, and lasting basis for identification in the new nation rather than political or cultural nationalism that are inherently divisive and competitive, emphasizing differences rather than commonalities. Only the spinning wheel, declared Gandhi, stood "above all discord and differences" as "the common property of every Indian." It was a transcendent icon of the radically transformed political economy of the new nation.

By 1927, the clamor for a new satyagraha campaign grew among volunteer workers and Congressmen. Gandhi was reluctant to embark on another potentially explosive course of non-cooperation and civil disobedience, however. He reiterated that satyagraha was not just an instrument of blackmail, extortion, and manipulation but a form of civic action that was supposed to be as transformative of the satyagrahi as it was of the injustice it sought to remedy:

> Since satyagraha is one of the most powerful methods of direct action, a satyagrahi exhausts all other means before he resorts to satyagraha. He will therefore constantly and continually approach the constituted authority, he will appeal to public opinion, educate public opinion, state his case calmly and coolly before everybody who wants to listen to him, and only after he has exhausted all these avenues will he resort to satyagraha. But when he has found the impelling call of the inner voice within him and launches out upon satyagraha he has burnt his boats and there is no receding.

Satyagraha was a tactic that had to be undertaken as an act of last resort and only as part of a larger strategy of wide-ranging, relentless, constructive work.

In 1928, Gandhi remarked on the ineffectiveness of modern representative politics as a force in Indian political life that could be truly radical and transformative and improve the lot of the masses of impoverished Indians. He criticized the Congress for "stultif[ying] itself by repeating year after year resolutions...when it knows that it is not capable of carrying them into effect...[and thus] makes an exhibition of its impotence, becomes the laughing-stock of critics and invites the contempt of the adversary." In 1929, he set out a concrete plan of action for aspiring leaders. He said that as an "army for swaraj," they "must go beyond the speech-making stage to the action stage" and deliver

> an account...of how many lavatories they cleaned, and how many wells in how many villages, how many bunds [earthen dams] they built, how many patients they attended on, how much khadi [handspun] they wove, how many wells or tanks they dug, how many night-schools they conducted and so on.

This was a mode of leadership that had to be enacted through service at the local level and had to involve the civic engagement of local people in ways that were immediately relevant to their lives and welfare. He declared that it was "perfectly useless to suggest remedies which are beyond the means of the people." Western models of "development" and "progress" could not be replicated in a country that could not appropriate the resources and would not engage in the violence and coercion needed to make them work.

In 1930, in the face of calls for a new satyagraha campaign, Gandhi continued to promote the constructive program as a training ground for individuals and construction site for community-building. A community organized around common work would not be merely an imagined community but a performed community. He advised volunteer

workers that constructive work "throw[s] together the people and their leaders…[and] therefore is for the non-violent army what drilling, etc. is for an army designed for bloody warfare." In 1936, he laid out his modus operandi, explaining to volunteer workers that no elaborate planning or preparation was needed to prosecute the constructive program

> Without any elaborate scheme I have simply tried in my own way to apply the eternal principles of truth and non-violence to…daily life and problems…like a child…I did whatever occurred to me on the spur of the moment during the course of events.

The only eligibility criteria for a leader or worker striving within the framework of the constructive program were "a character above suspicion…ceaseless effort accompanied by ever-increasing knowledge of the technique of the work and a life of rigorous simplicity."

In 1936, he acknowledged his failure to move educated Indians and nationalists to participate wholeheartedly in the constructive program and took the blame for this poor commitment when he admitted "I am no speaker, neither is the pen my profession…I have written…because I could not help it…it is not my business to live speak or to write…[but] to live amongst [the villagers] and show them how to live." In 1942, he again remarked on the lamentable need to keep up his verbal appeals to educated Indians and nationalists and declared "As long as I can write I will go on explaining…[since] neither the people nor the government realize the full implications of my plan." In spite of his "imperfect language [that was] but a poor and an imperfect vehicle" for the truths he was inviting Indians to experiment in, he would continue to provide advice for them to "ponder over."

In 1947, Gandhi was weary of the rioting that had engulfed the nation and appalled at the callous indifference of the nationalists and educated Indians to the situation, paying more attention as they did with constitution-making and power-sharing formulae. Gandhi warned them that "A time [would] surely come when nobody will listen to...long speeches; nobody will even attend...meetings, for preaching sermons to the people without following those principles in your own lives does not work long in society." He reminded them that "Constructive work is not a strategy or a technique of fighting...[but] connotes a way of life...that can be carried on only by men who have adopted it by the heart as well as by the intellect." The constructive program was the only program that could regenerate the nation materially as well as spiritually and carry all the citizens along with it without leaving behind any remainders on the margins.

Gandhi described the constructive program as a grand "experiment": a community of scientists set apart from society, trying out innovations in social, economic, and political life, sharing experiences and insights, engaging in self-reflexive and collective critiques, revising goals and strategies—an engine of reform. This quest for a new self and community had to be partly reclaimed and partly invented. Respected traditions and customs and the latest cutting-edge information and technology had to be questioned alike and abandoned if found unsuitable. Recognizing the limits of activism and protest politics, he sought to develop a program of constructive work whereby common people could take responsibility for their own welfare and work to achieve it.

Green labels this new brand of Gandhian politics "naïve," explaining that such a brand of politics results not from

> any lack of knowledge or analytic power, but a readiness to act on one's beliefs

> and hopes—as if one person, or a small group, could alter life, without using power or force against others, and without developing elaborate analytic theory, simply by beginning to live differently, between one day and the next.[20]

In prosecuting his constructive program, through his naïve politics, Gandhi tried to "infect other people, and at least temporarily checkmate both the power of force and the power of theory."[21] Both violence and "expert" solutions were unacceptable in a movement that sought to encourage ordinary people to engage in local enterprises to better themselves and their communities.

The naïve politics of Gandhi's constructive program was often charged with being "a contradiction of common sense…radically different from the traditional and the accustomed."[22] Focusing on rural India, Gandhi confronted an almost impenetrable bulwark of tradition and custom enmeshed in violence and exploitation. Impatient with the "systematic" conceits and "authoritarian" proclivities of modern Indian nationalists, Gandhi insisted tirelessly that the most pressing question facing India was not what brand of nationalism she should aspire to, but rather, the pragmatic question of "What then must we do?"[23] He was always reluctant to discuss abstract constitutional and legal questions and maintained that India needed a politics of direct action in which the masses could participate. Gandhi's call to claim personal freedom through a regimen of renunciation and self-discipline and to regenerate the nation through social service in the local community was, however, unappealing to many nationalists whose political ambitions were tied to the imaginaries of the modern nation-state. For can praxis that eschews all

---

[20] Green 15
[21] Green 17
[22] Green 20
[23] Green 31

forms of violence and coercion expect to prevail against established power and privilege? Or did Gandhi pursue this seemingly impossible agenda because he believed that established power and privilege of some kind or other was always an inevitable element of the human condition? The revolutionary's goal, in such a view, would be simply to range oneself against the establishment, trying to render its power transparent, and holding it accountable and liable for its sins of omission and commission while always seeking more equitable alternatives.

Promoting a naïve politics through the constructive program, Gandhi categorically rejected vital foundations of modern life such as industrialization, urbanization, bureaucratization, professionalization, and commercialization. Such a naïve politics depends upon the resourcefulness of individuals and local communities as they struggle to disengage themselves from an oppressive order and reclaim their autonomy and self-determination. So the constructive program aimed at calling common Indians to experiment individually and in their local communities to improve their lives as their best bet to attaining the independence and self-determination necessary for an empowered and fulfilling life.

Conclusion

After his return to India in 1914, and especially through the constructive program, Gandhi ranged his movement not narrowly against the imperial system (as he had done in South Africa) but, more broadly, against the vast modern processes that were sweeping across the whole world such as the industrialization, commercialization, and bureaucratization of the economy, polity, and society, and the globalization of capital with its attendant destruction of local autonomy and self-determination. In this struggle,

he found himself fighting not only international colonialism but also internal colonialism—the complex and powerful network of indigenous vested interests that had grown and become consolidated around the imperial establishment and were keen to replace the British but preserve the state of their creation.

In prosecuting this struggle, Gandhi has been accused of taking "little account of the acute economic and political problems facing post-independence India which could not be tackled without a strong and at least moderately centralized state."[24] However, while Gandhi did reluctantly recognize the necessity (indeed, inevitability) of a centralized, coercive state, he wanted to constantly challenge the hegemony and privilege of that state and was even leery of entrusting that task to the institutions and associations of a modern civil society that left too many Indians unrepresented.

Gandhi has also been charged with "overestimate[ing] India's political and cultural resources...a public space, a vibrant political culture, a body of active citizens and channels of organized self-expression."[25] Through the constructive program, Gandhi was actually trying to generate these resources in local communities throughout the subcontinent, eschewing the modern centralized structures and programs that invariably left out a majority of the population. He realized that the majority of Indians' resources and abilities were best deployed in their immediate communities and laid much emphasis on generating the "right" leadership that would be able to tap into these local resources for local regeneration across the nation. He also vehemently opposed the modernist strategy of appropriating power and resources at the center and reallocating them in accordance with an ideology or in line with elite interests and priorities.

---

[24] Parekh, Gandhi's Political Philosophy 115
[25] Parekh, Gandhi's Political Philosophy 115-6

Brown suggests that Gandhi should not be viewed "as if he had been solely a dispenser of blue-prints for a brave new world" and, instead, urges an appreciation of Gandhi "as a dynamic leader whose greatest influence flowed from the type of movement he led and the techniques he used, rather than from the peculiarly personal ideals he held."[26] But Gandhi's dearly held (albeit evolving) ideals were embodied in his person, enacted in his satyagraha campaigns, and informed his constructive program and so are inseparable from his movement and technique. Gandhi reiterated, throughout his public career, that means and ends were inseparable and that the former were more important than the latter because they (the vehicle) had to carry the latter. And so, rather than recommending a new kind of strategy and attendant tactics to hasten the acquisition of political sovereignty for India, Gandhi was attempting to create a revolutionary alternative consciousness and praxis of citizenship that ordinary people could realize wherever they found themselves. He was trying to initiate a revolution in ends—a paradigm shift—as well as a revolution in means.

Gandhi's ideal was not a coherent framework of instrumental goals and plans of action, nor was it a philosophical smorgasbord that could be picked and chosen from at will. His movement—the complementary combination of satyagraha and the constructive program—was a loose but integrated praxis of individual discipline and communitarian service that was grounded in a particular subject position (more moral than instrumental)—that of an experimenter in truth. It was, therefore, less an ideology than an invitation to a personal commitment to the improvement of self and community through dedication to nonviolence and service.

---

[26] "The Mahatma and Modern India" 321

In the hegemonic contest against modernity and its allies, Gandhi's ideal seemed to be at a decided disadvantage. As Parekh observes,

> modernism had advantages denied to its rivals. It was intellectually coherent and had a clearly worked out answer to India's problems...Its ideas connected with the new economic and political reality unfolding under colonial rule and had an air of realism about them...And since modernism proposed to take India along well-trodden paths, it made few demands on political imagination and creativity.[27]

And, yet, there were so many marginalized by modernity and who seemed to find a rallying point in Gandhi's movement—at least in its negative aspect, satyagraha. What was less popular was the positive aspect of Gandhi's movement, the constructive program. Perhaps it failed to offer a sufficiently potent and viable challenge to the strengths of modernity Parekh identifies. Or did Gandhi attempt too much when he tried to embrace the entire subcontinent all at once, from a position that was seemingly improbable?

Gandhi's leadership was largely a charismatic one—he provided few cogent arguments for his claims and demands and even fewer coherent plans of action for the nebulous goals he held out to nationalists and volunteer workers as he asked them to revision themselves and their nation. As Kurtz observes, "If judgment is to provide resolution, it must enact specificity...The rhetor wanting to shape the judgments of the audience must present with clarity the questions around which a crisis centers."[28] Calling people to participate in non-cooperation and civil disobedience—dramas of good versus evil, of specific victories over oppressive powers—Gandhi was spectacularly successful

---

[27] Parekh, Colonialism 68
[28] Kurtz 285

in mobilizing hundreds of thousands to disobey laws, refuse payment of taxes, and court beatings and arrest. His calls to the tedious, open-ended, mundane, and obscure tasks of the constructive program met with spectacular indifference. As independence drew nearer and the need for satyagraha diminished, so did Gandhi's charismatic hold on Indian's imagination. He was now an old man telling uncomfortable truths, making onerous demands, and issuing severe warnings.

He had several times suggested that his writings be burned with his corpse and had once famously declared, "My life is my message." Gandhi's legacy, therefore, remains an object-lesson of how one person can find freedom and self-reliance and live a satisfying if not rewarding life on his own terms. It provides not a blueprint for corporate organization but inspiration for personal transformation and direct action that has the potential to attract collaboration and grow into a mass movement. Gandhi wanted to transform himself into a catalyst in the regeneration of his nation; he was not a conventional politician. His way, therefore, holds out the promise of a fulfilling and challenging life only to those who are so dissatisfied with the world as it is that they are willing to let no obstacle stand in their way as they attempt to create a new one for themselves.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

"Let the reader mentally plan out the whole of the constructive programme, and he will agree with me that, if it could be successfully worked out, the end of it would be the independence we want." [1]

"If this preliminary observation has gone home to the reader, he will find the constructive programme to be full of deep interest. It should prove as absorbing as politics so-called and platform oratory, and certainly more important and useful."[2]

Although disappointed, throughout his career, at the scant and half-hearted commitment that his constructive program received from nationalists and the general population, in 1941 (and 1945) Gandhi reiterated his firm (desperate?) claim that it provided the only feasible and effective ways and means to bring "true swaraj" to Indians. He listed twenty initiatives that would have to be subsumed under the rubric of the constructive program[3], although he insisted that the list "does not pretend to be exhaustive; it is merely illustrative."[4] Throughout his career, but especially once independence became imminent, he had a hard time convincing skeptics, critics, and followers alike that India could become a free, sovereign, self-determining, and self-reliant nation through the dutiful pursuit of the initiatives of the constructive program.

---

[1] Gandhi, Constructive Programme 7
[2] Gandhi, Constructive Programme 4
[3] These initiatives were the promotion of communal unity, the removal of untouchability, the prohibition of intoxicants, the promotion of khadi (handmade textiles), the promotion of other village industries, the promotion of village sanitation, the promotion of new or basic education, the promotion of adult education, the improvement of the status of women, the promotion of education in health and hygiene, the promotion of the provincial languages, the promotion of Hindi as a national language, the promotion of economic equality, the promotion of kisans (peasants) welfare, the promotion of labor welfare, the promotion of adivasis (aborigines) welfare , the promotion of the welfare of lepers, the mobilization and organization of students for constructive work, the improvement of cattle, and the restructuring and reorientation of the Congress into an organization that promoted rural welfare.
[4] Gandhi, Constructive Programme 3

Throughout his public career, beginning in the late-nineteenth century in South Africa, Gandhi slowly but steadily moved away from an agenda that sought to refashion and reorient formal politics and in the direction of an agenda that sought "a revolutionary change in the mentality and tastes of many."[5] He strove to convince Indians that the only way to ensure their regeneration and revitalization was to pursue "that lasting and healthy deliverance [that] comes from within, i.e., from self-purification" and not from an occasional participation in the rituals of modern representative democracy.[6] Such an agenda of regeneration and reorientation, however, would have to be carried on nonviolently and even non-coercively for, although Gandhi "wish[ed] that all hands pulled in the same direction,"[7] he realized that "non-violence is a process of conversion"[8] and his revolution would have to be prosecuted one individual and one local community at a time, for it to be truly effective.

Gandhi lamented that the crucial constituencies and publics of the nation, such as women, students, and nationalists were "acted upon by every variety of influences," that "Non-violence offer[ed] them little attraction," and that politics at all levels was increasingly becoming "a never-ending trial of brute strength."[9] In such a climate, even the perfectly nonviolent practice of satyagraha would not be an appropriate and adequate strategy to win true swaraj. True autonomy, self-determination, and self-reliance, that guaranteed the regeneration of nation and individual, could be had only "if the co-operation of the whole nation is secured in the constructive programme."[10] Gandhi

---

[5] Constructive Programme 11
[6] Constructive Programme 11
[7] Constructive Programme 23
[8] Constructive Programme 22
[9] Constructive Programme 26
[10] Constructive Programme 29

insisted, throughout his career, that "Civil Disobedience without the constructive programme [would] be like a paralysed hand attempting to lift a spoon."[11]

Gandhi's Constructive Program: A Summary

I set out, in this dissertation, to begin the project of revisiting a large and important component of Gandhi's movement—his constructive program. It was the positive, sustained, and increasingly more urgent aspect of his movement vis-à-vis satyagraha and, in order to get a more comprehensive picture of Gandhi's movement—its scope, nature, achievements, failures, and legacy—it is essential that Gandhi's satyagraha be studied in conversation with his constructive program.

I was dissatisfied with the quantity and quality of the scholarly attention paid to Gandhi's rhetoric within the context of the complex, multi-authored, intertextual, and polysemic discourse of his movement. Attention to Gandhi's rhetorical efforts (as opposed to merely his sensational mass satyagraha campaigns) is crucial if one is to identify and understand the more enduring, if less obvious, effects of Gandhi's movement: its impact on political (rhetorical) culture by fundamentally and radically altering the agenda, forums, initiatives, and practices of the Indian nationalist movement. I was also dissatisfied with the scant and superficial scholarly attention paid to his constructive program and the failure to apprehend it as an integral and definitive dimension of Gandhi's movement. It was through the constructive program that Gandhi sought to revolutionize concepts such as nationalism, citizenship, civic participation, development, and welfare—all issues not exhaustively dealt with through satyagraha.

I was motivated to write this dissertation by the need for a revisionist reading of Gandhi's movement with particular attention to the trajectory of his utterances in

[11] Constructive Programme 30

connection with the constructive program that he promoted throughout his public career. This dissertation is the first step in this re-visitation. Accordingly, in this dissertation, I set out to identify the rhetorical trajectory whereby Gandhi promoted a concerted (if not coherent) program of direct action as the framework within which the diverse "classes" and "masses" of India could unite in an enterprise of individual, communitarian, and national regeneration through self-discipline and communitarian cooperation in social service.

In Chapter One, I explained that my decision to revisit Gandhi's constructive program emerged from my desire to understand his efforts to effect radical social, economic, and political change nonviolently and through voluntary mass participation. In many ways what Gandhi attempted from the end of the nineteenth century until the middle of the twentieth century speaks to the challenges and problems facing India even today when these problems are more overwhelming and have more dire consequences for the very survival of the majority of Indians. Accordingly, I claim that, in the constructive program, Gandhi did not simply outline a plan for rural reconstruction that can be dismissed out of hand as being too idealistic or infeasible.

I identified some salient aspects of Gandhi's movement that makes it an archive that a rhetorical critic interested in studying nationalism, citizenship, and civic participation would find compelling. The scant scholarly attention Gandhi's movement has received from rhetorical critics is surprising. I discussed the contributions and shortcomings of a few prominent studies of Gandhi's movement from an ostensibly rhetorical perspective and explained how my study of Gandhi's movement from a

rhetorical-historical perspective might enlarge this small but important and growing conversation by recovering a large body of his discourse from obscurity.

I outlined the scope of my study, explaining that I had decided to focus on Gandhi's attempts to transform or displace the imperialist hegemony and nationalist movement and reclaim spaces and discourses where common Indians could refashion their lives according to their own aspirations and abilities. Throughout his movement, and especially through the constructive program, Gandhi attempted to decolonize and reorient ordinary Indians through an agenda that went far beyond a claim for formal political sovereignty and the creation of a modern nation state. He wanted greater autonomy and self-reliance for the individual and local community as well as a network of communities (and, thereby, a nation) marked by greater direct popular participation and equity. All these radical transformations would have to be premised on a new paradigm of welfare and development, vastly different from the modernist model that had taken hold of the whole world.

I approached the constructive program as a body of discourse and paid particular attention to Gandhi's invitational messages (spurring mobilization and organization) rather than his attempts to promote specific initiatives of the program itself (dealing with the details and logistics of their operationalization and implementation). I set out to explore how Gandhi defined and redefined the goals, agendas, participants, policies, and ways and means of the Indian nationalist movement; claimed and created new spheres of mass direct political and civic action; called forth and instructed a new citizenry; and appointed new leaders who would enact unconventional and unprecedented forms of leadership.

In Chapter Two, I argued that, to properly attend to the constructive program as discourse, it is crucial that one pay attention to the entire trajectory of messages over the entire duration of Gandhi's movement and, so, I went through all ninety-seven volumes of Gandhi's Collected Works. While I acknowledge that the authorship of Gandhi's rhetoric and the discourse of his movement are extremely complex and hybrid, in this study, I paid attention only to Gandhi-authored messages and, even then, only to those meta-messages in which Gandhi spoke about the constructive program to key constituencies. I did not attend to the vast body of discourse in which Gandhi actually outlined the various initiatives of the constructive program in specific situations to discrete individuals and communities. I also commented upon these messages only in terms of their substantive content and historical context. My focus was to establish the constructive program as an integral and definitive part of Gandhi's movement and I have left a more detailed contextualization, analysis, and critique of that discourse for later.

I characterized this study as the erection of "a scaffolding for staging the constructive program"—the first necessary step in a much larger project. While much scholarly attention has been paid to retracing, analyzing, and evaluating Gandhi's nonviolent struggle against injustice and exploitation in British India (satyagraha), in this dissertation I set out to retrace his non-coercive campaign to transform the identities, relationships, priorities, and practices of common Indians and their leaders as well as the social, economic, political, religious, and spiritual aspects of communitarian and national life.

I then outlined the various constituencies that Gandhi engaged. The few scholarly references to the constructive program so far have ignored the fact that the constructive

program was a body of discourse and an ongoing trajectory of rhetorical performance and repertoire rather than a couple of pamphlets published toward the end of Gandhi's public career. As such, the constructive program should be "read" as more than a repository of Gandhi's ideological declarations and policy recommendations that were utopian and hopelessly out of sync with the political and economic realities and imperatives of colonial and postcolonial India. I argued that a deeper analysis and evaluation of the discourse of Gandhi's movement and his constructive program have to take account of the shifting exigencies, audiences, and purposes that drove their emergence and evolution.

I pointed out that lack of attention to context is another flaw in the extant scholarship on Gandhi's movement and his constructive program. More attention must be paid to historical events, political exigencies, situational and other constraints, and crises that informed Gandhi's responses and initiatives in his satyagraha campaigns and the constructive program. Ceccarelli's concept of polysemy encapsulates the goal of this study—the first step in a much larger on-going research project—and I suggested a way of reading the constructive program that has not been undertaken so far. This is, however, not a definitive reading, but an invitation to scholars in several fields (such as history, political science, and sociology), but especially in rhetorical studies, to engage in reflection and argument on the potential of nonviolent, non-coercive, discursive means to resist injustice and exploitation and initiate radical change.

I argued that Zarefsky's historical-rhetorical approach is most appropriate when trying to map out a social movement that has spanned several decades. However, I found it necessary to go beyond Zarefsky's recommendation to consider Gandhi's rhetoric not

only as a response to exigencies (such as the two World Wars) but to also include his proactive initiatives (such as the handmade textile movement and the expansion of the Congress membership and agenda) that Gandhi undertook throughout his career.

I acknowledged the heuristic value of Jasinski's concept of "discursive constitution" that allows a rhetorical critic to speculate on the ways in which a particular text or body of discourse shapes the formation of subject positions, the organization of time and space, the norms of communal existence, and fundamental political concepts that enable and constrain communal life. In this study, I undertook a similar exercise vis-à-vis the constructive program and tried to elucidate how Gandhi sought to radically transform the above four dimensions of political (rhetorical) culture in colonial and postcolonial India through its various initiatives. However, in this study, I focus on the intra-textual aspects of the meta-messages I have selected for analysis and their relation to audience and context. I do not attend to the "cultural circulation" and "discursive articulation" of the discourse of Gandhi's movement and his constructive program. These aspects will provide the basis for future studies such as explorations of the Gandhians and Gandhisms that emerged during Gandhi's lifetime and after his death.

In Chapter Three, I demonstrated how Gandhi's various utterances, including his pamphlets, cannot be understood apart from the whole trajectory of the discourse that attended his satyagraha campaigns and constructive program. He was constantly reinventing his movement in terms of its agenda, aims, and methods. Both satyagraha and the constructive program were evolving in an organic progression—variously responsive, proactive, reactionary, cautious, timely, and incongruous, but never predetermined or programmatic.

The first attempt at forging a constructive program, on Gandhi's entry into public affairs in 1884, consisted of his urging expatriate Indians in South Africa to emulate their European betters and thereby earn greater rights and responsibilities as full-fledged subjects of the British Empire. He criticized Indians for their selfishness, narrow mindedness, xenophobia, lack of sanitation and hygiene, and poor record of public service and urged a profound introspection into and regeneration of individual and communitarian life. It was only in 1909, after a failed mission to London, that Gandhi threw overboard the ideal subjecthood recommended under Pax Britannica. Gandhi castigated not only British imperialism but all of modern civilization and he urged nationalists in India to reformulate the concepts of self-rule, development, and welfare to achieve a true swaraj that would alleviate the misery of all Indians, especially the marginalized.

Gandhi returned to India for good, in 1914, eager to steer the stagnant nationalist movement in a new direction. He spent three years traveling the length and breadth of the subcontinent to acquaint himself firsthand with the conditions of the common people and his realization that constructive work had to go hand-in-hand with satyagraha grew stronger. While conducting some successful satyagraha campaigns against the government and indigenous collaborators, he called for a new kind of leadership and citizenship at the level of the local community as a prerequisite to gaining true self-rule. He ceaselessly pointed out the various threats that plagued India from within many of which would only be exacerbated with British withdrawal. He explicitly stated that his movement was two-pronged and that the constructive program was more important.

In 1920, he launched the Non-Cooperation Movement and promised freedom within one year but was sorely disappointed with the degeneration of the campaign into violence; and his commitment to the constructive program intensified. He insisted that it was the ideal site for education in citizenship and could also serve as an experimental laboratory for trial and error experiments in social policy and practice. He advocated a restrained use of satyagraha and insisted that Indians were not yet disciplined enough to practice it properly but would have to participate in the constructive program as preparation—to obtain the discipline and competence to offer true satyagraha.

With the Constitution of 1919 and local governing bodies handed over to elections, the Congress seemed poised to enter the fray of representative democratic politics. Gandhi issued the first call for the formation of a body of "public servants" who would stay aloof from partisan politics and work to facilitate direct popular action in local communities. He stressed the need for a multi-pronged platform of external resistance (by the disciplined and trained few) as well as internal regeneration (by the populace at large). At this time, he also started the swadeshi campaign and the revitalization of the textile industry, outlining a protocol for rural reform and urging would-be leaders to "immerse" themselves in village work. He directly appealed to women to take a greater part in public life, especially within the framework of the constructive program. While he did make a few direct appeals to upper-caste Hindus for the removal of the practice of untouchability, he addressed untouchables with appeals for restraint and patience, perceiving them as unready for the rigorous discipline and detachment required for the practice of a nonviolent politics. He stressed the need for more numerous and disciplined

leaders at the local level as the only way to ensure that popular direct action was a feasible alternative to modernist representative democracy.

In 1921 Gandhi suspended the Non-Cooperation Movement and launched a drive to expand the numerical strength and demographic diversity of the Congress hoping to revitalize the population and transform the party at the same time. He wanted a Congress agency in every village with a proper electorate. He thought that he could get the Congress to adopt the constructive program as its basic agenda and operational framework and thereby earn the trust and support of the population. He forged horizontal and vertical linkages among various constituencies and publics across the subcontinent and built up a juggernaut that was later to dwarf and eclipse his movement while progressively drifting away from his prescriptions and strictures.

In 1922, for the first time, he outlined a list of activities and programs that he henceforward referred to as the "constructive programme." However, with his outright rejection of Indian participation in local self-governing bodies within the imperial administration, he failed to build a strong base in the local governing bodies. He insisted that the constructive program afforded greater opportunities for training leaders and the masses alike in the responsibilities and duties of self-government but his invitations had few takers and the constructive program grew steadily weaker as more and more volunteer workers entered formal politics.

In 1925, he redefined his political goals and declared that he was more concerned with the "internal growth" of Indian individuals and communities than with expelling the British. He recommended the promotion of the handmade textile industry as a nationwide enterprise of reconstruction and regeneration and undertook an exhausting

tour to promote it in North India with little success. Dismissing the new constitutional process as inadequate and counterproductive to India's needs and aspirations, Gandhi alienated modern nationalists and many supporters as well. He also sought to dampen the persistent enthusiasm for satyagraha by laying down a strict and demanding protocol for its prosecution—insisting that it was more concerned with promoting self-discipline than a compelling political tactic—and declared that it could be at best only a last-resort tactic in a larger political strategy that had to be preoccupied with the constructive program.

From 1927 onwards, Gandhi began to understand the scope and depth of the erosion of his influence over the Congress, his supporters, and the common people and the unrelenting apathy that met the constructive program. He continued to criticize the Congress and the apathy and indiscipline of the populace, refusing to spearhead another satyagraha campaign. However, in 1929, Gandhi decided to channel the massive and growing unrest into another satyagraha campaign—the Civil Disobedience Movement—but declared that only those who had engaged in constructive work should participate in it. He tried to set discrete, specific goals for the nebulous constructive program and declared that the pressing challenge was to find volunteer workers to cover the 700,000 villages of India and transform them by evolving a "solid and constructive programme contemplating an attack on all fronts." He drew up a new manifesto for the Congress, urging it to turn away from representative politics and adopt the constructive program wholeheartedly.

By 1934, convinced that the Congress had been irrevocably transformed into a modern political party, Gandhi resigned his membership. He formed the All India Village Industries Association (AIVIA) to constitute a continuing link with the Congress

and other political parties—a platform of common action that could transcend all ideological and teleological differences. But it too came to be perceived as a futile distraction from the real business of formal politics and Gandhi obtained dismal results in recruiting volunteer, non-partisan workers. The Constitution of 1935, granting India provincial autonomy, brought more power to Indian nationalists and strengthened political parties and, despite greater criticism from Gandhi, more and more volunteer workers got inducted into the formal political machinery that kept growing.

With the outbreak of war in 1939, the provincial ministries resigned in protest of India being dragged into hostilities without their being consulted. Gandhi urged them to adopt the constructive program and engage in internal reform. He recommended it again as a "non-political meeting ground" and laid down even more stringent eligibility criteria to engage in satyagraha, the most important being that a satyagrahi would have to stay away from formal politics and ought to have participated in the constructive program by way of preparation and self-discipline. In 1941, Gandhi compiled the pamphlet, Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place, in response to popular demand but also remarked upon the declining enthusiasm for the constructive program while continuing to insist that it alone could stimulate "brave, corporate, intelligent work" and constitute "common ground between the rulers and the people."

In 1942, Gandhi felt compelled to channel the growing popular unrest into yet another satyagraha campaign, the Quit India Movement, by which he also aimed to pull the Congress out of its slough of lethargy and drift. Once more the campaign degenerated into violent confrontation and had to be called off. Taking stock of the

constructive program, Gandhi noted that the 700,000 villages had not yet been reached and warned that British withdrawal would only lead to greater chaos than already existed.

In 1946, Gandhi described the "parliamentary programme" that the nationalists had embarked upon (drawing up an Interim Government and a Constituent Assembly, etc.) as "building from the top" and urged building from below under the aegis of the constructive program. He declared that the constructive program was the only "swaraj machinery" India needed and renewed his call for volunteer workers. From then on, he was also preoccupied with stanching the violence that had begun to rage across northern India and ended his life in despair and despondence, calling the attainment of freedom from British rule "suffocating." Until his assassination in 1948, he accused the Congress of not knowing what to do with the independence it had gained and urged its disbandment and the dispersal of its members as volunteer workers across rural India. He died insisting that constructive work was not a "strategy or technique of fighting" but a "way of life" that alone could "resuscitate the village."

In Chapter Four, I explained how the rhetorical nature and power of Gandhi's constructive program was very different from that of his satyagraha and his polemical pamphlet, Hind Swaraj (1909). The latter derived its power from a dramatistic vision of an on-going war between good and evil and possessed clearly discernible elements of the Burkeian pentad. The former was embedded in a less coherent narrative and derived its power through more nebulous rhetorical devices such as metaphors, ideographs, icons, and rituals. I discussed how Gandhi's movement—satyagraha and constructive program—transformed the Indian nationalist movement from a solidly modernist, elite, and conservative platform that pursued an extremely limited grievance procedure with

the imperial power into a vast, populist movement that can be characterized as postmodern and radically revolutionary.

Through social imaginaries (such as swadeshi and trusteeship), Gandhi rejected modern ones (such as free trade and civil society) and invited people to redefine themselves as they claimed greater autonomy from the state and the institutions of the modern political economy at the individual and communitarian levels. Using Gaonkar's concept of praxis vs. instrumental action, I argued that Gandhi fostered greater autonomy and this led to an emancipatory social reform movement and revolutionary politics. I explained how the constructive program functioned as a framework and repertoire for mass participation in local public affairs. It fostered the creation of and drew upon collective knowledge, memory, and social connections. Satyagraha was a negative repertoire that entailed renunciation, self-restraint, sacrifice, non-cooperation, and civil disobedience. The constructive program, on the other hand, was a positive repertoire that entailed engagement in cooperative social work for communitarian welfare.

I discussed the significance of the constructive program as a battle for public space to be waged in local communities for greater personal and communitarian autonomy, self-determination, and self-reliance. Through the constructive program, Gandhi sought to fashion a public space apart from the formal politics of representative democracy and the globalized economy—a space wherein the inevitably vast remainders of modernity could find a place of dignity and empowerment. I also discussed the significance of Gandhi's emphasis on the metaphor of experimentation as the iconic paradigm of radical but improvisational reconstruction as local communities engaged in

trial-and-error efforts to arrive at ways and means of withdrawing from the structures and practices of modernity to form a viable, parallel nation.

I argued that the constructive program invited the formation of a public as it held out no institutional framework or constitution and would necessitate the mobilization of a platform of volunteer workers organized through discourse rather than through an institutionalized hierarchy. Gandhi's movement was marked by several forms of nonverbal discourse expressed through the media of dress, diet, rituals, performances, and routine practices. These rhetorical acts aimed to challenge, modify, or displace the status quo, vested interests, and dominant coalitions, and create the conditions for more inclusion, participation, and equity in public life.

The rhetoric of Gandhi's movement was also marked by an ironic paradox: he invited an ostensibly modern public (a population of strangers linked by discourse) to pursue an anti-modern or postmodern agenda. Drawing upon Warner's claim that it is the concatenation of texts through time that creates a public, I argued that when the flow Gandhi's far-ranging and eclectic discourse ended with his assassination, the public that had formed around it also died out. Warner also maintains that a discourse must be marked by "punctual and abbreviated" circulation of messages in order to sustain a public. After Gandhi's death, there were just several compilations and reprints of his "works" and no leader emerged to continue the discourse that sustained Gandhi's constructive program. The public (however small and inadequate) that remained energized by the discourse of Gandhi's constructive program dwindled, after his death, into a group—an "enclaved" public at best that relied more upon the re-reading and

interpretation of Gandhian "scripture" than upon a living discursive exchange in a vigorously collaborative and experimental enterprise.

Throughout his public career, but especially after his resignation from the Congress in 1934, Gandhi urged the formation of a perpetual counterpublic—a set of volunteer workers and leaders of local communities who would remain aloof from formal politics and range themselves against the dominant paradigm of modern representative democracy and global capitalism. However, all resistance that this counterpublic would exercise would have to be nonviolent and all its efforts to effect revolutionary reform would, ultimately, also have to be reconciliatory. These contradictory ambitions and constraints opened Gandhi and his movement to charges variously of utopia, regression, and reaction from different constituencies.

Through his movement—satyagraha and the constructive program—Gandhi wanted to effect a transformation not only of structure and policy but of the space and nature of public life itself. He wanted to achieve a "paradigm shift"—a displacement of imperialism and modernity and their replacement with participatory democracy and communitarian self-determination. Through satyagraha Gandhi was able to achieve a considerable erosion of imperial rule, indigenous vested interests, and modern nationalism. His efforts to refashion individual and communitarian life through the initiatives of the constructive program, however, were less successful.

In Chapter Five, I commented on the far-ranging influence of the constructive program on the political (rhetorical) culture of the Indian nationalist movement. Through it Gandhi attempted to transform Indians' consciousness, identities, bodies, relationships, and practices at the individual, communitarian and, ultimately, national levels.

At the outset of his public career, Gandhi used his ability to speak across racial, cultural, religious, and linguistic divides to create at least a limited commonality of purpose—gaining greater enfranchisement and civil rights for Indians. Later, his agenda expanded to encompass a demand for complete independence from the British Empire. His novel strategy of satyagraha was spectacularly successful in many local instances. With the obvious and repeated failures to keep his mass (nationwide) satyagraha campaigns nonviolent, however, Gandhi began to lay greater emphasis on his constructive program as a less risky platform for national integration, mobilization, and regeneration. He warned Indians that their first priority ought to be to put their own chaotic house in order even as they struggled to evict the British from it. Millions of Indians would have to be accommodated within the new nation on equitable terms and, to this end, Gandhi promoted a model of a transcendent nation based on a minimalist and austere state that would devolve most legislative, judicial, and executive power to self-governing and self-sufficient local communities. This was a prescription few modernist politicians found palatable, and the crucial political constituencies found the vision of a strong, centralized, modern welfare state that would redistribute opportunities and costs and guarantee rights and privileges more compelling.

Gandhi tirelessly called into being a new citizen, who would be critically introspective, disciplined, and active in social service in the local community without regard to social barriers or hope of reward. He stressed the assumption of duties and obligations rather than a clamor for rights and privileges as the basis for citizenship. He maintained that political action had to be reconceived to include the mundane choices and routine practices of daily life. He urged austerity, frugality, and restraint as prerequisites

of good citizenship and healthy communitarian organization. He held out engagement in one or more of the initiatives of the constructive program as the best schooling in this new paradigm of citizenship—through it common Indians could collaborate in a vast enterprise aimed at reconstructing their selves, families, communities and, ultimately, the nation along sound scientific and moral principles by pursuing the constructive program within their local communities.

In his dealings with politicians and educated Indians—the political and social elite—Gandhi took on the role of parrhesiastes or truth-teller. He urged them to acknowledge and curtail their foibles and mistakes, jealousies and envies, ambitions and rivalries, and to own greater responsibility for securing the greater common good of ordinary Indians. As Indians gained greater autonomy under colonial rule and eventually faced the prospect of complete independence, Gandhi's criticism of the Indian leadership and dominant sections of society became sharper and his promotion of the constructive program more insistent. This quality of Gandhi's public address, however, is largely responsible for his progressive marginalization from formal politics and his diminishing influence over politicians, vested interests, and professionals—the dominant coalition of postcolonial India. His fearless speech ultimately also proved to be dangerous speech and led to his assassination in 1948.

Gandhi entered the public sphere as a moderate activist pressing for better governance and civil rights in South Africa towards the end of the nineteenth century. The five decades of his public career, however, saw a gradual withdrawal from the formal public sphere of petitioning and lobbying and a greater reliance on satyagraha—non-cooperation and civil disobedience—for the redress of grievances and the promotion of

greater justice and equity in public affairs. But when even satyagraha proved to be of limited use and dangerously prone to turning violent, Gandhi recommended the local community as the best public sphere in which citizens might become engaged, where, ostensibly, popular access would be easiest, the impulse to violence would be weakest, and the drive to altruism the strongest. One vehicle of the modern public sphere that Gandhi adhered to throughout his career was the print medium and his "viewspapers" were an important site of his public address along with his ashrams, voluntary associations, and lengthy tours of the subcontinent. But this discourse was addressed mainly to literate Indians who aspired to positions of leadership and social influence. For the common Indian, the best sphere in which to enact an empowered citizenship was the local community and the best means was participation in one or more of the initiatives of the constructive program. But this austere, free-wheeling, and tedious enterprise was too constrained and unattractive to powerful interests and constituencies that found the modernist paradigm more promising and enabling.

Eschewing party politics, the rituals and practices of modern representative democracy, and centralized and hierarchical programs of development and reform, Gandhi urged common Indians to engage in "direct action" wherever they found themselves. Participation in the constructive program within their local communities would be the best way they could take responsibility for their own welfare and strengthen their selves and communities without relying on a remote and callous state and a hopelessly alien and inadequate modern civil society. As Green notes, Gandhi was promoting a "naïve" form of political-civic action to a naïve and powerless population that would be an option only for the thoroughly marginalized and disenfranchised.

As his public career progressed, Gandhi ranged his movement not only against the British imperial system, but against modernity at large. Beginning with formal and constitutional demands for better governance, greater participation, and expanded civil rights from the imperial government, Gandhi became increasingly concerned about expanding the autonomy, empowerment, self-determination, self-reliance, and self-respect of the lowliest of Indians and that meant he had to range his movement against indigenous vested interests as well. Even after independence from the British Empire, Indians had a long way to go to achieve true self-rule and this would be an ongoing struggle that would never end. The constructive program was the best site at which this sustained struggle could be carried on nonviolently and creatively. It was not a blueprint for corporate organization or strategic policy but a catalyst to bring about radical change among the people who needed it most and who were least equipped to procure it. It requires an acute and chronic discontent with the status quo that alone can produce the will to work for change against all odds and alone if need be—not a very good basis for a far-ranging and long-running political platform.

Faced with ninety-seven volumes of Gandhi's Collected Works, and the long trajectory of the constructive program in Gandhi's movement, I decided to limit my study of the discourse of the constructive program to only those texts that advanced the meta-discourse whereby Gandhi tried to outline the framework within which the initiatives, programs, and tactics of the constructive program would become meaningful. As a result, I have been able to demonstrate that the constructive program was an integral and definitive dimension of the discourse of Gandhi's movement that advanced new social imaginaries as Gandhi challenged Pax Britannica and modern Indian nationalisms.

This study has offered a new way to look at the constructive program—as a platform of mass, direct political action in response to prevailing situations and crises rather than as a "blueprint" for future social and economic policy in the new republic (although it also attempted that enterprise albeit not systematically and exhaustively). The constructive program was also intended to serve as a school that would produce a new citizenry and leadership that would radically reorient India away from colonial and modern imperatives and help Indians gain true autonomy, self-determination, and self-reliance in their individual and communitarian lives.

This dissertation, however, is marked by limitations in terms of content and method. In the first place, as mentioned earlier, I have considered only the meta-messages promoting the constructive program and not the actual prescriptions regarding the various initiatives of the constructive program. I have not paid attention to the intertextuality that Gandhi's messages bore vis-à-vis other utterances within and outside his movement and the "conversation" he often engaged in with supporters, critics, and skeptics. I have not paid attention to the reception of Gandhi's utterances by the several constituencies and publics he addressed including peasants, labor, untouchables, women, students, volunteer workers, political parties, the press, and the establishment (colonial and postcolonial).

I have also attended to only the verbal artifacts contained in the Collected Works. The reader might, therefore, form the impression that the discourse of the constructive program comprised of a chronological progression of editorials, correspondence, speeches, interviews, and pamphlets. I have not looked at nonverbal artifacts such as photographs, rituals, ashrams, dress, diet, marches, prayer meetings, and the rich array of

nonverbal elements that the verbal messages were often embedded within and that contributed immensely to their rhetorical nature and effect.

While I traced the trajectory of Gandhi's utterances concerning the constructive program during his lifetime, I did not attend to the numerous contemporaneous Gandhians and Gandhisms that emerged outside his movement but informed it; nor have I considered those that emerged after his assassination in 1948. Finally, the historical contextualization provided in this study drew upon very limited sources—the prefaces and chronological timelines provided in the Collected Works and a few secondary biographical and critical studies of Gandhi and his movement. Further research into more specific aspects of Gandhi's constructive program would entail greater attention to reducing the shortcomings I have just listed.

Revisiting Gandhi's Legacy

In January 1948, in one of his last editorials addressed to the new Congress-led Provisional Government, Gandhi once more urged them to undertake the prosecution of the constructive program as a top priority and reminded them that so far he had "only opened to view the distant scene."[12] He instructed public leaders and the followers that still remained with him to ignore his eclectic and often inconsistent writings and instead consider his life as his message and look, for inspiration, to one another as they continued to experiment with ways of refashioning their private and communitarian lives to increase their autonomy, self-determination, and self-reliance. The constructive program, in order to remain a living and dynamic force in independent India, would have to get a life of its own so that it could continue to exist even after Gandhi was no longer around. Salazar

[12] Constructive Programme 32

outlines the task facing the survivors and inheritors of a nationalist movement after the original guiding lights of that movement have departed:

> Shaping a nation requires, in rhetorical terms, a process of popular argumentation, together with and beyond the process of public argumentation. The latter rests largely on single "orators," whose function is...to deliberate and to perform, to argue and to show the way to give a nation a stock of tropes that policy can be said to reflect or detract from, in the process of national upbuilding. In contrast to this...popular argumentation, in order not to be a fiction, needs to be disseminated, multiauthored, "mediatic," insofar as the media plays the role of relay between "people's voice"...and the initial inventio brought into action by "orators." The process can be termed epideictic. The people are led not so much to reflect, ponder, and deliberate as to "demonstrate"—to "show off"—their phrasing of communal values; and by the same token, to perform these values, to give them rhetorical substance, to "own the process."[13]

The constructive program, in this view, can be seen as epideictic discourse, but one that was fundamentally opposed to the official colonial and postcolonial public argumentation and values and that urged, instead, the experimental adoption and revision of attitudes and values that would lead to a more inclusive and just society.

In spite of Gandhi's injunction that his verbal legacy be ignored (burned with his corpse), I have chosen to attend to the vast archive compiled after his death by governments that laid little store by his insights and prescriptions and, instead, fashioned a public image of him that was able to sit (albeit uneasily) with their agenda and priorities that were vastly different from his. Gandhi was opposed to his utterances being

[13] Salazar 93

approached as authoritative scripture by people who were unwilling to accept his invitation to engage in personal and communitarian regeneration by trying to emulate his life and thereby would turn his movement into another bone of contention in an already fractured nation. I turned to his Collected Works in my attempts to understand how and why Gandhi promoted the constructive program as a worthy alternative to modernity and to see whether his utterances still exert some inspirational hold or offer some heuristic value to researchers and activists looking for ways and means to live with hope and commitment in the "fifth edition of Europe and America" that is contemporary India.

Having become familiar with the discursive (verbal) trajectory of Gandhi's movement in general and his constructive program in particular, I have found several elements of his discourse (verbal and nonverbal) compelling enough to warrant further historical-rhetorical investigation and speculation as to their continued value and efficacy today. Taking seriously Gandhi's declaration, "My life is my message," I would pursue a series of "body studies" (as Alter suggests) and attend to Gandhi's experiments with diet, dress, sexuality, exercise, manual labor, meditation, sanitation and hygiene as means of promoting not just individual but also communitarian discipline, health, empowerment, and influence. Another set of concerns dear to Gandhi's weltanschauung can be characterized as "action and performance studies" and would include such phenomena as prayer meetings, hymn-singing, marches, sit-ins, boycotts, fasts, and days of silence, also aimed at enhancing the health, power, and consequence of individuals and communities. Attending to such rhetorical acts and artifacts would afford deeper and more comprehensive insights into the ways in which Gandhi tried to refashion the lives of

ordinary Indians to allow them more dignity and well-being and to be able to claim greater autonomy, self-determination, and self-reliance.

WORKS CITED

Ahmad, Razi. Indian Peasant Movement and Mahatma Gandhi. Delhi, India: Shabd Prakashan,1987.

Aloysius, G. Nationalism without a Nation in India. Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Alter, Joseph S. Gandhi's Body: Sex, Diet, and the Politics of Nationalism. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000.

Bakshi, Shiri Ram. Gandhi and Status of Harijans. New Delhi, India: Deep & Deep Publications, 1987.

Barthes, Roland. Image, Music, Text. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977.

Bean, Susan S. "The Fabric of Independence: Mohandas K. Gandhi's Fashion Evolution." Parabola 19.3 (Fall 1994): 29-33.

Biesecker, Barbara A. "Rethinking the Rhetorical Situation from within the Thematic of Differance." Philosophy and Rhetoric 22:2 (1989): 232-246.

Brown, Judith M. "Gandhi and Human Rights: In Search of True Humanity." Gandhi, Freedom, and Self-Rule. Ed. Anthony J. Parel. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001: 87-101.

---. "Gandhi and India's Peasants, 1917-22." Paper for discussion. University of London: Centre of International and Area Studies, 8 June 1973.

---. Gandhi's Rise to Power: Indian Politics 1915-1922. London; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1972.

---. Modern India: The Origins of an Asian Democracy. Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

---. "The Mahatma and Modern India." Modern Asian Studies 3.4 Gandhi Centenary Number (1969): 321-342.

---. "The Making of a Critical Outsider." Gandhi and South Africa: Principles and Politics. Ed. Judith M. Brown and Martin Prozesky. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996: 21-33.

Ceccarelli, Leah. "Polysemy: Multiple Meanings in Rhetorical Criticism." Quarterly Journal of Speech 84 (1988): 395-415.

Chabot, Sean. "A Culture of Peace in Motion: Transnational Diffusion of the Gandhian Repertoire from India to the U.S. Civil Rights Movement." International Journal of Humanities and Peace 16.1 (2000): 1-63.

Chatterjee, Partha. Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993 (1986).

Chaudhri, Sandhya. Gandhi and the Partition of India. New Delhi, India: Sterling, [c.1984?].

Clement, Catherine. Gandhi: The Power of Pacifism. Trans. Ruth Sharman. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996.

Copley, Antony. "Is There a Gandhian Definition of Liberty?" Gandhi, Freedom, and Self-Rule. Ed. Anthony J. Parel. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2000: 25-45.

Dalton, Dennis. Mahatma Gandhi: Nonviolent Power in Action. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

De Certeau, Michel. The Writing of History. Trans. Tom Conley. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.

Embree, Ainslie T. "The Function of Gandhi in Indian Nationalism." The Meanings of Gandhi. Ed. Paul F. Power. East-West Center, The University Press of Hawaii, 1971: 59-76.

Foucault, Michel. "Technologies of the Self." The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, v.1: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth. Ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: The New Press, 1997: 225-252.

---. The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language. Trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1976.

Fox, Richard G. Gandhian Utopia: Experiments with Culture. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989.

Gandhi, M.K. Collected Works. 97 vols. to date. Comp. Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India: 1958-1994.

---. Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place. Ahmedabad, India: Navajivan Publishing House, 1983 (1941, 1945).

---. Hind Swaraj and Other Writings. Ed. Anthony J. Parel. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Gaonkar, Dilip Parameshwar. "Toward New Imaginaries: An Introduction." Public Culture 14.1 (2002): 1-19.

Gaur, I.D. Essays in History and Historiography: India's Struggle for Freedom. New Delhi, India: Anmol Publications Pvt. Ltd., 1998.

Giddens, Anthony. Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979.

Gill, S.S. Gandhi: A Sublime Failure. New Delhi, India: Rupa & Co., 2001.

Green, Martin. Gandhi: Voice of a New Age Revolution. New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1993.

Hartnett, Stephen John. Incarceration Nation: Investigative Prison Poems of Hope and Terror. Walnut Creek: Alta Mira, 2003.

Jasinski, James. "A Constitutive Framework for Rhetorical Historiography: Toward an Understanding of the Discursive (Re)constitution of 'Constitution' in The Federalist Papers." Doing Rhetorical History: Concepts and Cases. Ed. Kathleen J. Turner. Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press, 1998: 72-92.

---. "Instrumentalism, Contextualism, and Interpretation in Rhetorical Criticism." Rhetorical Hermeneutics: Invention and Interpretation in the Age of Science. Ed. Alan G. Gross and William Keith. SUNY Press, 1997: 195-227.

Kaushik, Asha. Politics, Symbols and Political Theory: Rethinking Gandhi. Jaipur and New Delhi, India: Rawat Publications, 2001.

Kurtz, Jeffrey B. "Condemning Webster: Judgment and Audience in Emerson's 'Fugitive Slave Law.'" Quarterly Journal of Speech 87.3 (August 2001): 278-290.

Lelyveld, David. "Words as Deeds: Gandhi and Language." Competing Nationalisms in South Asia: Essays for Asghar Ali Engineer. Ed. Paul R. Brass and Achin Vanaik. New Delhi, India: Orient Longman, 2002: 173-186.

Lyotard, Jean-Francois. The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Theory and History of Literature 10. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

Malhotra, S.L. Ed. Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian National Congress: Studies in Gandhi's Contribution to the Development of the Indian National Congress. Chandigarh: Publication Bureau, Panjab University, 1988.

Nanda, B.R. In Search of Gandhi: Essays and Reflections. New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Novak, David R. "Engaging Parrhesia in a Democracy: Malcolm X as a Truth-teller." Southern Communication Journal 71.1 (March 2006): 25-43.

Olson, Kathryn M., and G. Thomas Goodnight. "Ingenium—Speaking in Community: The Case of the Prince William County Zoning Hearings on Disney's America." New Approaches to Rhetoric. Ed. Patricia A. Sullivan and Steven R. Goldzwig. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2004: 31-59.

Pantham, Thomas. "Thinking with Mahatma Gandhi: Beyond Liberal Democracy." Political Theory 11.2 (May 1983): 165-188.

Parekh, Bhikhu. Colonialism, Tradition and Reform: An Analysis of Gandhi's Political Discourse. Rev. ed. New Delhi, India; Thousand Oaks, CA; London: Sage Publications, 1999 (1989).

---. Gandhi's Political Philosophy: A Critical Examination. Delhi, India: Ajanta Book International, 1995 (1991, 1989).

Parel, Anthony J. Introduction. "Gandhian Freedoms and Self-Rule." Gandhi, Freedom, and Self-Rule. Ed. Anthony J. Parel. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2000: 1-23.

Patton, Cindy. "Refiguring Social Space." Social Postmodernism: Beyond Identity Politics. Ed. Linda Nicholson and Steven Seidman. Cambridge University Press, 1995: 216-249.

Pinto, Vivek. Gandhi's Vision and Values: The Moral Quest for Change in Indian Agriculture. New Delhi, India; Thousand Oaks, CA; London: Sage Publications, 1998.

Power, Paul F. Introduction. The Meanings of Gandhi. Ed. Paul F. Power. The University Press of Hawaii, 1971: 3-7.

Prabhu, Joseph. "Gandhi: Visionary for a Globalized World." ReVision 24.1 (Summer 2001): 2-8.

Pradhan, Sadasiba. Agrarian and Political Movements: State of Orissa, 1931 to 1949. New Delhi, India: Inter-India Publications, 1986.

Pramanik, Nimai. Gandhi and the Indian National Revolutionaries. Calcutta, India: Sribhumi Pub. Co., 1984.

Prasad, K.M., and Ramhee Singh. Eds. Sarvodaya of Gandhi. New Delhi, India: Raj Hans Publications, 1984.

Rothermund, Indira. "Gandhi and the Hindu-Muslim Problem." Gandhi: Maker of Modern India? Ed. Martin Deming Lewis. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1965: 87-90.

Rudolph, Susanne Hoeber. "Gandhi's Lieutenants—Varieties of Followership." The Meanings of Gandhi. Ed. Paul F. Power. The University Press of Hawaii, 1971: 41-58.

Rudolph, Susanne and Lloyd. Gandhi. University of Chicago Press, 1983.

Rudolph, Susanne Hoeber, and Lloyd I. Rudolph. Gandhi: The Traditional Roots of Charisma. Chicago and London: the University of Chicago Press, 1983 (1967).

Salazar, Philippe-Joseph. An African Athens: Rhetoric and the Shaping of Democracy in South Africa. Mahwah, NJ; London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2002.

Sengupta, Somini. "Often Parched, India Struggles to Tap the Monsoon." New York Times 1 October 2006, late ed., sec. 1: 1+.

Spear, Percival. "Mahatma Gandhi." Modern Asian Studies 3.4 Gandhi Centenary Number (1969): 291-304.

Steger, Manfred B. Gandhi's Dilemma: Nonviolent Principles and Nationalist Power. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000.

Taylor, Charles. "Modern Social Imaginaries." Public Culture 14.1 (2002): 91-124.

Terchek, Ronald J. "Gandhian Autonomy in the Late Modern World." Gandhi, Freedom, and Self-Rule. Ed. Anthony J. Parel. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2000: 47-62.

---. Gandhi: Struggling for Autonomy. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998.

Terrill, Robert E. "Protest, Prophecy, and Prudence in the Rhetoric of Malcolm X." Rhetoric & Public Affairs 4.1 (2001): 25-53.

Thomson, Mark. Gandhi and his Ashramas. Bombay, India: Popular Prakashan, 1993.

Turner, Kathleen J. Introduction. "Rhetorical History as Social Construction." Doing Rhetorical History: Concepts and Cases. Ed. Kathleen J. Turner. Studies in Rhetoric and Communication. Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1998: 1-15.

Van Dijk, Teun Adrianus. Elite Discourse and Racism. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1993.

Warner, Michael. "Publics and Counterpublics." Public Culture 14.1 (2002): 49-90.

Zarefsky, David. "Four Senses of Rhetorical History." Doing Rhetorical History: Concepts and Cases. Ed. Kathleen J. Turner. Studies in Rhetoric and Communication. Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press, 1998: 19-32.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Allwyn Tellis

Home 5 Ali Apartment (Khalil Mansion)
Spence Road
Byculla
Mumbai 400 008
India
tellisallwyn@yahoo.com

Education

Ph.D. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, IL
Speech Communication (Rhetorical Studies)
Degree expected in December 2006
Advisor: Dr. Thomas Conley

M.S. Radford University, Radford, VA
Corporate and Professional Communication
Degree Awarded: May 1998
Advisor: Dr. Joseph A. Flickinger

L.L.B. K.C. Law College (University of Bombay), India
Law
Degree Awarded: 1993

B.A. St. Xavier's College (University of Bombay), India
Indian History & Sociology
Degree Awarded: 1986

Non-Academic Work Experience

1994-1996 Radford University, Radford, VA
Studio/Laboratory Assistant: Department of Media Studies

1993-1994 The Associated Cement Companies Limited, Mumbai (Bombay), India
Secretarial Assistant

1988-1992 Tata Consultancy Services, Mumbai, India
Secretarial Assistant

1986-1987 *Parisar Asha* (Environmental Education Center), Mumbai, India
Typist & Accounts Assistant

Teaching Experience

Wabash College, Crawfordsville, IN (2005-2006)

- *SPE 101: Public Speaking*
  An introductory course in Public Speaking and Rhetorical Criticism
- *SPE 220: Persuasion*
  A course in the Theory and Practice of Persuasion as part of Decision-making in a democratic society
- *RHE 145: Legal Debate*
  A course applying the Principles of Debate Theory and Practice to Argumentation in the Legal Domain
- *RHE 370: Rhetoric of Nationalism*
  A course examining Nationalism and Citizenship as complex rhetorical constructs influenced by economic, political, social, and cultural forces

Parkland College, Champaign, IL (Spring 2005)

- *SPE 101: Introductory Speech Communication*
  An introductory course in Public Speaking and Communication Theory

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (1997-2005)

- *SPCM 101: Public Speaking*
  An introductory course in Public Speaking
- *SPCM 111/112: Verbal Communication*
  A two-semester sequence of courses that combine Introductory Public Speaking and Introductory Composition
- *SPCM 223: Argumentation*
  A course in Argumentation Theory, Analysis, Evaluation and Practice

Teaching Honors

I have been included in the "Incomplete List of Teachers Rated as Excellent" compiled each semester by the Division of Measurement and Evaluation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. (Instructors and Faculty are named to the List when their students' evaluations put them in the top 30% of Instructors and Faculty campus-wide.)

- Fall 1997
- Spring 1998
- Fall 1998
- Spring 1999
- Fall 1999
- Fall 2000

- Fall 2001
- Fall 2002
- Fall 2003
- Spring 2004
- Fall 2004

(The above may be verified at http://www.cte.uiuc.edu/dme/ices/incldir.html)

Teacher Education and Leadership

Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Workshop, 2001
A Workshop on Teaching Writing in various Disciplines conducted by the Department of English, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Peer Leader to new SPCM 111/112 Instructors, 2000-2001
As the Instructor's Manual for SPCM 111/112 states, "Peer Leaders are selected upon evidence of good teaching, interest in pedagogy and/or working with other teachers." In the capacity of Peer Leader, I

- Led sessions on issues related specifically to SPCM 111/112 during the Fall and Spring Orientation for new Instructors
- Worked with new Instructors on issues related to classroom practices and activities, grading and evaluation, student relations and concerns
- Presented Sample Exercises or Classroom Activities during All-Staff Meetings
- Reviewed and evaluate the Classroom Performance of New Instructors
- Participated in Discussions about Curriculum Changes and Textbook Selection, and contributed to the "Teaching Resources File"

Teaching Interests

- I would like to continue to teach courses in Public Speaking, Composition, Argumentation, Persuasion, Legal Rhetoric, and Rhetoric of Nationalism
- I would also like to teach courses in History of Rhetoric in the Western Tradition (Classical, Medieval, Modern, and Postmodern), Non-Western Rhetorical Traditions, Rhetorical Criticism, Rhetoric of Social Movements, Rhetoric of Religion, Political Rhetoric, Rhetoric of Public Policy, and Rhetoric of Science

Brief Description of my Dissertation

In this dissertation, I have examined a largely ignored but vital aspect of Mahatma Gandhi's public career—his constructive program. He coined this term after he returned to India for good, using it to refer to a range of programs and practices whereby he hoped to radically reorient Indians physically, psychologically, socially, economically, politically, and spiritually to achieve "true freedom" not only from British rule, but from modernity as well. Arguing that attention to this aspect of Gandhi's project should not be

limited to the pamphlet (of the same name) he wrote in 1941, I have traced the constructive program as a body of discourse comprising speeches, correspondence, interviews, editorials, and pamphlets addressed to various audiences, at different times, and for different purposes. I approach the constructive program as a grassroots social movement aimed at national reconstruction and reorientation that was an integral part of Gandhi's nationalist movement and more important than Gandhi's nonviolent campaigns against injustice and exploitation (satyagraha). The constructive program influenced Indian politics and nation-building in the first half of the twentieth century as much as satyagraha.

Dr. Thomas Conley, Professor, Department of Speech Communication, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, was my advisor on this project.

Research Interests

- Social Movements
- Nationalism
- Body and Performance Studies

Publications

De Silva, Dakshina G., and Allwyn Tellis. "Deregulation of the Telecommunications Industry in Sri Lanka." Southwestern Journal of Economics 3.2 (2000): 112-141.

Convention Presentations

Tellis, Allwyn. "Hind Swaraj: Gandhi's Entry into Indian Nationalist Politics." Competitive Paper accepted by the Argumentation and Forensics Division, presented in the Paper Session "Student Papers in Argumentation and Forensics" at the National Communication Association Convention, Miami Beach, FL, 2003.

Tellis, Allwyn. "The Public Sphere in Mahatma Gandhi's New India." Competitive Paper accepted by the Rhetorical and Communication Theory Division, presented in the Paper Session "Civil Society and the Public Sphere" at the National Communication Association Convention, Miami Beach, FL, 2003.

Tellis, Allwyn. "A Self-Centered Agenda for Social Reform: Gandhi's Prescriptions for Radical Dissent." Competitive Paper accepted by the Political Communication Division, presented in the Paper Session "Communication in Action: Advancing Radical Ideas" at the National Communication Association Convention, New Orleans, LA, 2002.

Tellis, Allwyn. "Photographic Contestation in British India: Scopic Regimes or Rhetorical Cultures?" Competitive Paper accepted by the Visual Communication Commission, presented in the Paper Session "Communication in Action: The Theory and

Practice of Photojournalism" at the National Communication Association Convention, New Orleans, LA, 2002.

Tellis, Allwyn, and Joohyun Lee. "Interpreting the Wilderness: Rhetorical Strategies in Outdoor Recreation Promotion." Competitive Paper presented by Dr. Joohyun Lee in the Paper Session "Recreation Planning and Management I" at the Eleventh Northeastern Recreation Symposium held at Bolton Landing, NY, 1999.

Awards and Honors

- Doctoral Completion Fellowship, Department of Speech Communication, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Summer 2004.

- Doctoral Completion Fellowship, Department of Speech Communication, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Summer 2003

- Certificate of Achievement in Recognition of Academic Excellence from International Student Services, Radford University, 1995-6.

Organizational Membership

- National Communication Association
    - Argumentation and Forensics Division
    - Public Address Division
    - Rhetorical and Communication Theory Division

References

Dr. Thomas Conley, Professor (and Advisor)
Department of Speech Communication
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Tel: 217-333-1864
Fax: 217-244-1598
E-Mail: t-conley@uiuc.edu

Dr. Cara Finnegan, Associate Professor (and SPCM 111/112 Course Director)
Department of Speech Communication
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Tel: 217-333-1855
Fax: 217-244-1598
E-Mail: caraf@uiuc.edu

Dr. Stephen Hartnett, Associate Professor
Department of Speech Communication
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Tel: 217-333-1593
Fax: 217-244-1598
E-Mail: hartnett@uiuc.edu

Dr. Todd McDorman, Associate Professor and Chair
Department of Rhetoric
Wabash College, Crawfordsville, IN
Tel: 765-361-6183
Fax: 765-361-6432
E-Mail: mcdormat@wabash.edu

Dr. Gwendolyn O. Brown, Associate Professor
Department of Communication
Radford University, Radford, VA
Tel: 540-831-5530
Fax: 540-831-5883
E-Mail: gbrown@radford.edu