

***Swaraj and Swadeshi:***  
**Gandhi and Tagore on Ethics, Development and Freedom**

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**1. “Svaraj in Ideas”; Ideas about Swaraj**

Gandhi introduced the terms *swaraj* and *swadeshi* to colonial Indian discourse. While many academics and activists adopted these terms in their framings of the Indian independence struggle, consensus on their interpretation was hard to come by. The debate between Tagore and Gandhi is often taken as crucial in the contest over the meanings of these terms, but the interpretation of *that* debate is itself contested. We would like to re-examine that well-known debate as it is refracted through the lens of an epistemological predicament articulated by KC Bhattacharya. This will allow us to see more clearly both the agreement and the disagreement between Tagore and Gandhi, and to better understand why Tagore regarded Gandhi’s ideology as not only *shortsighted*, but *incoherent*.

In his lecture “Svaraj in Ideas” (1928) Bhattacharyya articulates for his students the kind of *swaraj* worth fighting for. At a moment when the desire for *political* freedom was at center stage, Bhattacharyya focuses instead on a form of subjugation at the same time more subtle and more powerful than political colonialism, a form so subtle as to be phenomenologically invisible.

We speak today of Svaraj or self-determination in politics. Man’s domination over man is felt in the most tangible form in the political sphere. There is however a subtler domination exercised in the sphere of ideas by one culture on another, a domination all the more serious in the consequence, because it is not ordinarily felt. Political subjection primarily means restraint on the outer life of a people and although it tends gradually to sink into the inner life of the soul, the fact that one is conscious of it operates against the tendency. So long as one is conscious of a restraint, it is possible to resist it or to bear it as a necessary evil and to keep free in spirit. Slavery begins when one ceases to feel the evil and it deepens when the evil is accepted as a good. Cultural subjection is ordinarily of an unconscious character and it implies slavery from the very start. When I speak of cultural subjection, I do not mean the assimilation of an alien culture. That assimilation need not be an evil; it may be positively necessary for healthy progress and in any case it does not mean a lapse of freedom. There is cultural subjection only when one’s traditional cast of ideas and sentiments is superseded without comparison or competition by a new cast representing an alien culture which possesses one like a ghost. (“Svaraj in

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\* With invaluable assistance from Shama Rahman and Noreen Ahsan

Indias,” in Bhushan and Garfield 2011, p. 103)

This is the subjugation constituted by immersion, from a very early age, in a cultural, conceptual and evaluative framework that is not one’s own. This immersion, effected by education and public discourse, as well as by political and commercial institutions, is so total that one comes to inhabit the foreign values and ideology without any awareness, thereby unconsciously accepting one’s own ideological imprisonment, indeed, experiencing it as freedom.

In the case of colonial India, this subjugation was facilitated by the adoption of broadly western cultural norms, ways of seeing, values and habits of mind, all ingested in the English language, the medium of instruction at the premier Indian schools and universities, including the one at which Bhattacharyya was professor. As a consequence of this linguistic and cultural hegemony, the deliberate policy since MacCaulay’s “minute,” all ideas, from abstract physics to notions of nation, self and culture, were inevitably articulated from an orientation that promotes itself as neutral, self evidently objective and universal, despite its particularity. Immersion in that conceptual scheme leads those subjected to it to adopt those practices and perspectives as their own in their own quest for neutral, objective, universalist maturity. This intellectual certainty in the fact of a freely chosen realm of ideas and practices is reinforced phenomenologically in the degree of felt comfort and familiarity with which one inhabits it. But this very certainty, argues Bhattacharyya, is illusory, and represents the deepest form of false consciousness.

...[W]e ourselves asked for this education, and we feel, and perhaps rightly, that it has been a blessing in certain ways. I mean only that it has not generally been assimilated by us in an open-eyed way with our old-world Indian mind. That Indian mind has simply lapsed in most cases for our educated men, and has subsided below the conscious level of culture. (*Ibid.*, p. 104)

As Swami Vivekananda would put it, “this, too, is *māya*.”

Bhattacharyya argues instead that this education was something no Indian could confidently claim as his or her own (p. 386) According to his profound diagnosis of the epistemological predicament of the colonial Indian subject, this educational system alienated Indians from the norms, ways of seeing and habits of mind necessary for “an authentic intellectual life” (Shah, 473). Thus what was taken to be genuine cultural progress during that time was a sham, or in Bhattacharyya’s words, “imaginary

progressiveness” (p. 105). What was taken to be genuine reform was rote imitation, and imitation is the very antithesis of freedom, as it stands in the way of creativity, and of fresh thinking, which must always be particular, contextually grounded and differentiated.

Bhattacharyya’s point here is that this loss of creativity is structurally and institutionally grounded. Its restoration, therefore, while not impossible, would require a radical restructuring of the way we approach knowledge. Bhattacharyya envisions this restructuring in terms of an expansion and a critique of the foundations and norms taken for granted, rather than their wholesale elimination and replacement. For instance, multiple languages would be taught and utilized; India’s ancient philosophy, religion and ways of life would be introduced as part of the valuational background, generating opportunities for multiple perspectives and orientations. Such immersion in multiple literatures and practices would enable a genuine appraisal of all values in play; and, significantly, for the development of a doubt that is deep and rich. For Bhattacharyya, doubt is the epistemic attitude that renders an authentic life possible. Doubt fosters the cultivation of a skeptical sensibility that brings a person or a nation into serious confrontation with the ideas and values that it takes for granted. This kind of internal confrontation—whether within an individual or within a nation—is the surest guarantor of the genuinely free life.

Bhattacharyya’s educational and cultural goal is not a “hybridisation” of ideas. (p. 106). The route to an authentic intellectual, social and political life is a product not of free mixing, but of hard critical thinking. This in turn is made possible only by accessing that which in the colonial context remains hidden – one’s own traditions, forms of reflections and habits of mind and heart. Such access is made possible by explicit exposure in the first instance, and by critical reasoning, reflection, doubt and serious comparison in the second. Nor does Bhattacharyya advocate the rejection of one set of ideas – western and modern -- and the preservation and restoration to a privileged position of Indian ideas. In the end, he hopes for a renaissance of authenticity and creativity in the Indian context grounded in a reorientation of the mind.

It is in philosophy, or by philosophizing, in the sense described above, that Bhattacharyya sees the route to an authentic self-understanding and hence the route to freedom from “cultural subjection) and a “slavery of the spirit” (p. 103). The kind of *swadeshi* that is worth having, then, for Bhattacharyya, is one that trades in *desi* ideas. These are ideas that have been subject to doubt, to searching critical appraisal in light of multiple perspectives and orientations, and then found to be worth keeping. Ideas that are the result of such scrutiny, whatever be their historical or cultural origin, would be one’s own, *swadesh*. As we will see, this view of the nature of *swaraj* and *swadeshi* as fundamentally epistemic links Bhattacharyya to Gandhi who is also taken with an epistemological predicament that besets colonial India; but Bhattacharyya’s more cosmopolitan outlook and his solution are more akin to those of Tagore.

## **2. The Jagganath of Modernity: Problem or Promise**

Gandhi’s real target was modernity as a whole; he saw the British colonial rule of India only as a natural outgrowth of that process. Gandhi therefore argued not only for liberation from the *British*, not for a liberation that would permit India to *enter* the modern world order as an equal. Instead, he argued for a liberation *from* modernity itself, and for a *renunciation* of what he saw as the irretrievably immoral consequences of the ordering of life it entails.

Gandhi saw modernity as an inextricably linked web of political, industrial, economic and social institutions that pose a direct threat both to the individual and to the nation, a threat always disguised as a promise. The promise of modernity, particularly to those subject to colonial domination, is undeniable: the freedom represented by liberal democracy; the economic development, availability of consumer goods and social mobility made possible by capitalism and industrialization; the freedom of thought made possible by the march of secularism; the medical and other technical benefits made possible by science.

To many in the colonial era, including R Tagore, BK Sarkar and even J Nehru, modernization and the kind of liberation it entailed were part and parcel of the anticolonial struggle, providing the ideological basis for the critique of foreign domination, the technical and material basis of national prosperity and the mode of entry for a fully equal partner in a global community of nations. The great promise of

modernization was an independent India, a prosperous India, and an India that would contribute to, and benefit from free intercourse with other free, prosperous nations.

Gandhi took all of this hope to be a fraud, arguing that these baubles were but the lures tempting a grand and fundamentally morally sound culture to its own destruction, ensuring only the moral degradation and economic and spiritual enslavement of its citizens. His critique was grounded not on the claim that the benefits of modernity are outweighed by its harms, but rather the conviction that its putative benefits, when seen properly, are themselves harms.

How does this deep moral critique go? Modernity, Gandhi thought, could not support, but could only erode national identity, in virtue of the homogeneity of culture it entails. Cultural homogeneity is ensured by the export of social institutions, values, and even modes of dress and conduct made inevitable by the commodification and sale of all that is profitable and associated with progress. The adoption of English, of Western dress and taste, of English administrative and political institutions, and of capitalist modes of production were the immediate symptoms in colonial India. Contemporary global popular culture, he would say now, and global corporate culture are the modern confirmation of this prescient indictment, apocalyptic and paranoid-parochial as it might have seemed a century ago.

Modernity, Gandhi argued, is immoral at its core. Individual liberty is eroded, not enhanced, by modern society, its promise of choice in fact a coercion into a limited range of consumer options, or into interchangeable jobs as cogs in a single machine. Modernity vests real control only in those who control capital. Capitalism demands colonialism and a regime of production, commodification, violence and inequality of wealth that are mutually reinforcing. On Gandhi's view, to participate in its institutions is hence, to paraphrase Marx, to be complicit in one's own moral degradation.

But Gandhi's critique of modernity is not unqualified. After all, his own rhetoric of *swaraj*—although delivered in cadences borrowed from the *Gītā*, from Tolstoy and Thoreau—is also grounded in a call for liberty and political autonomy whose intellectual roots are in Kant and Mill, and a critique of the colonial project that is indebted to Jefferson and to Marx. Gandhi criticizes colonial rule and capitalism in part for its

deprivation of the very fundamental rights and liberties articulated by the social contract tradition, and for its abrogation of the rights of individuals and collectives to choose their own political leaders that is the heritage of the French and American revolutions. This tension runs through his political and moral work, a tension to which we return below.

### 3. Tagore and Gandhi on Ethics and Economics

Gandhi's twin terms *swaraj* and *swadeshi* encapsulate both his ethical/political theory and his approach to a new economics of postcolonial life. *Swaraj* means *self-mastery* or *self-rule*, and both the *swa* and the *raj* are nicely ambiguous. The first can denote either the individual or the national subject; the latter either spiritual self-control (that is, autonomy) or political rule (that is, autonomy). Gandhi was happy to play on this ambiguity and to argue that *swaraj* in the political sense is subordinate to and dependent on *swaraj* in the personal sense.

*Swadeshi* is also a nicely polysemic notion. The *swa* remains ambiguous in the familiar way. But how could *deshi* be read? Well, its obvious primary sense involves the products of one's own land—a kind of “buy Indian” campaign—and indeed, that was a large component of *swadeshi*. The most prominent example concerns the campaign to buy Indian *khadi* instead of Manchester. But just as there is a spiritual as well as a temporal side to *swaraj*, there is a temporal and spiritual side to *swadeshi*. A commitment to valorizing and practicing one's own traditions, languages, ideologies and forms of life is also a part of *swadeshi*, and in part—but only in part—motivates the material side (which after all, has as its most direct goal the protection of the welfare of native industries, handicrafts and livelihoods, though also, importantly, the forms of social organization they entail). For Gandhi, this commitment to valorize also entails a commitment to resist – to resist traditions, languages, ideologies, and forms of life alien to one's own culture. Resistance becomes a way of preserving one's own culture, and a way of preserving oneself from cultural heteronomy.

Bhattacharyya's account of *swaraj* incorporates the *positive* side of Gandhi's account of *swadeshi*—that is, an insistence on the creative engagement with one's own ideas and tradition. He is not, however, averse to *openness* to the ideas and traditions of others. He worries only about their becoming unconsciously *hegemonic*. We will see a similar

selective adherence to the positive, but not the negative side of Gandhian *swadeshi* in the thought of Tagore.

It should be clear that Gandhi's *swaraj-swadeshi* complex involves both ethical/political and economic dimensions. Ethically and politically, Gandhi calls for a kind of spiritual self-mastery, and for a materially self-sufficient social order governed at home, according to authentically national principles. Given the critique of modernity and capitalism that grounds this position, and in virtue of the impossibility of achieving either *swaraj* or *swadeshi* in the framework of modernity, this also demands, according to Gandhi, a pre-modern mode of production, consumption and economic order. We will explore the deeper motivations for this position below.

It is widely known that Tagore and Gandhi disagreed about *swadeshi*. It is less widely appreciated that their disagreement—fundamental as it was—was grounded in even more fundamental agreement about general principles. Tagore agrees with Gandhi that national unity and freedom are *spiritual*, rather than *political* goals. He also agrees that a substantial engagement with the specifically Indian philosophical, religious, artistic and social traditions is the essential vehicle for the recovery of personal and political freedom. For each, this set of commitments is the basis for their critique of British rule, not the mere fact that the British are not Indian. But whereas this spiritual understanding of independence unites them, the conclusions they draw from this understanding divide them.

Tagore, like Bhattacharyya, rejects the negative side of Gandhi's *swadeshi*. Whereas Gandhi adopts an essentially parochial reading of values and institutions, with its rejection of all things foreign, and an essentially conservative view of identity, Tagore is instinctively cosmopolitan and indeed progressive. A great deal of his critique of Gandhi's views of development rests on his view that Gandhi never took *economic* considerations seriously as *ethical*—as having value in their own right.

The critique has two points: first, Tagore regarded it as a duty of the nation to promote the material well-being of its citizens, and to the degree that this requires the adoption of new, modern, or even foreign methods or forms of organization, this at least *prima facie* legitimizes those interventions. While Gandhi dons the mantle of poverty as a virtue, for

Tagore poverty is by itself a *problem*. Second, Tagore regarded ideas and values as trans-national: he appreciated Japanese art, English poetry, Chinese calligraphy. On his view, national growth required not insulation from the world, but integration into it—not the adoption wholesale of a foreign imposition, but the willingness to import what is worthwhile and to export one's own values in return. In order to understand the Gandhi-Tagore debate more fully, it will be necessary to return to Gandhi and to his first principles of *swaraj and swadeshi*.

#### 4. Transparency and Opacity

In *Hind Swaraj* Gandhi rails against such apparently innocuous targets as doctors, lawyers and ordinary household machines. Many contemporary readers of these screeds react in shock and surprise, seeing this as a wholesale attack on anything new, and suspecting that Gandhi may have been nothing more than a slightly cracked Luddite. Why reject the good offices of those who might cure disease, or protect one from tyranny? Gandhi's critique does not, as one might be inclined to think, rely on the fact that these people take fees. He supports the right to earn a livelihood. Nor is this a wholesale rejection of anything mechanical. Why rail against power looms, but avail oneself of a spinning wheel? Against railroads (!), but not bullock carts? What is the fundamental principle is that guides Gandhi's critique?

When Gandhi approaches machinery and technicians of all kinds, he does so with an eye to the way that they organize life, to the way that they occlude that process of organization, and especially to the degree to which they make life opaque to those who live it. Consider the power loom or the locomotive engine. Gandhi emphasizes that each *regulates* the lives of those who live in their context. Their very production requires armies of regimented labor, concentration of capital and the minimization of expenses through a competitive labor market pitting workers against one another. Each requires labor to attend and operate the machine on regular cycles, regimenting the lives of those who use them. Each contributes in turn to the maintenance and intensification of the socio-economic order that gives it birth. (See also Sahasrabudhey [2002] pp 176-177, 179-191 for a similar analysis.)

Machinery has begun to desolate Europe. Ruination is now knocking at the English gates. Machinery is the chief symbol of modern civilization. It is a great sin.

The workers in the mills of Bombay have become slaves. ... It would be folly to assume that an Indian Rockefeller would be better than the American Rockefeller. Impoverished India can become free, but it will be hard for an India made rich through immorality to regain its freedom. (*Hind Swaraj*, 102-108)

Moreover, these processes of regimentation are taken for granted, accepted as natural, and fade into the background of consciousness, just as KC Bhattacharyya argued that the regimentation of thought by foreign education fades into the background. There is hence a tacit, but inevitable process of occlusion of the social violence done by this machinery, machinery that arrives with the promise of liberation from toil. Finally, the machinery itself is opaque to those who use it. Nobody who drives a locomotive, rides in a train, sells tickets, works at a powerloom, or buys Manchester has a clue how these machines actually work. That is the province of distant experts. The abstraction of the knowledge essential to production and its alienation from those most immediately involved in that production is complete.

The situation is very different for one involved with a bullock cart or a spinning wheel. These can be produced by ordinary people on their own time from locally available resources, using knowledge freely available in the communities in which the machines function. They can be used by individuals on their own time, with their own ends. And those who use them can simply see how they work. There is no abstraction, no alienation, and no reordering of society or redistribution of wealth and power built into these technologies, technologies though they may be. (Sahasrabudhey, pp 180-181) Gandhi's critique is hence not a critique of the machine *per se*, but of the opacity and alienation built into the modern incarnation of machinery.

This makes sense of the otherwise bizarre attacks on doctors and lawyers. For these professions, in modernity, as opposed to their premodern antecedents—*ayurvedic* healers and *panchayat* elders—trade on specialized knowledge and enframing structures of power akin to those induced by power machinery. The medical establishment, with its machinery of public health officials, hospitals and medical boards regiments not only the production of doctors and their practice but also access to medicine and to knowledge about illness and cure. The practice of medicine becomes opaque to patients, and the knowledge required in order to maintain health becomes increasingly abstracted and unavailable.

Doctors have almost unhinged us. ... Their business is really to rid the body of diseases that might afflict it... I over-eat. I have indigestion. I go to a doctor, he gives me medicine. I am cured. I over-eat again, and take his pills again.... A continuance of a course of a medicine must, therefore, result in loss of control over the mind. [63]

Hospitals are institutions for propagating sin, Men take less care of their bodies, and immorality increase. [63-64]

The legal establishment mystifies and regulates conflict and relations not only between individuals and the governments that structure their lives, but also between private individuals. Lawyers replace the dialogue with the lawsuit, the infraction with crime, justice with punishment.

...[L]awyers, as a rule, advance quarrels, instead of repressing them, Moreover, men take up that profession, not in order to help others out of their miseries, but to enrich themselves. [59]

It is wrong to consider that courts are established for the benefit of the people. Those who want to perpetuate their power do so through the courts. If people were to settle their own quarrels, a third party would not be able to exercise any authority over them. ... The parties alone know who is right. We, in our simplicity and ignorance, imagine that a stranger, by taking our money, gives us justice. (61)

Whether it be a doctor or a lawyer, a mediator who arrives as an ally in fact alienates the patient or client from his or her own life and interests.

This focus on alienation and opacity also illuminates Gandhi's apparently simple and straightforwardly romantic attachment to the village as the appropriate forum for human relationships. One might wonder what is wrong with a city, per se. After all, they offer so much. Once again, while it might appear that Gandhi is simply rejecting whatever is new, he is not. Gandhi saw that like certain machines and certain professions, cities implicitly and inexorably regiment life. Cities as well occlude from ordinary individuals the processes that structure their lives; they render the levers of control over one's life inaccessible, even invisible; and in the end, cities make life itself incomprehensible.

If we are to do without the railways, we shall have to do without the tramcars. Machinery is like a snake-hole which may contain from one to a hundred snakes. Where there is machinery there are large cities; and where there are large cities, there are tram-cars and railways; and there only does one see electric light.... I cannot recall a single good point in connection with machinery. (110)

For Gandhi, then, the problem with modernity is neither strictly political nor economical. As would Bhattacharyya, he saw that the real problem is epistemological and

phenomenological. Modernity and the gifts it promises inevitably alienate us from our own lives, from our own fellows, and hide that very alienation in the ribbons and bows of efficiency, rationality, wealth and progress. The problem of modernity is therefore a moral problem only in a *derivative* sense. Where we *sought* the self-mastery and freedom modernity promised, we *lost* the self-mastery and freedom that was once available to us, articulated in such profound texts as the *Gñā*, a mastery and freedom grounded in real *jñāna* and rendered impossible in the modern context.

##### 5. **Gandhi's Freedom; Tagore's Freedom**

We have in Tagore and Gandhi two distinct conceptions of freedom. Gandhi's freedom, which is at its core self-mastery, involves a *renunciation* of the material and political attractions of modernity as well as global entanglement, and the adoption of a simpler, more local, agrarian life. Tagore's freedom is entirely different. Tagore is after freedom *from* poverty and isolation, freedom *to* engage with others, and other cultures, freedom to create. Whereas Gandhi sees modernity as *antithetical* to freedom, Tagore sees it as a *vehicle* to that goal.

Recall that Gandhi's primary concern was epistemological: a concern about opacity in the modern world. Opacity and its deleterious consequences are exacerbated in the Indian colonial context by the wholesale imposition of western cultural practices, languages and norms, themselves constituting additional opaque layers. The goal for Gandhi was to replace that opacity with transparency. In practical terms this entails a shift from the complex specialized and regimented life of modernity to a simpler, premodern life. The renunciation of modernity is therefore mandatory if any kind of a meaningful, autonomous life is to be recovered.

Tagore, on the other hand, does not see opacity, *per se*, as a problem for colonial India. Certainly, opacity is *sometimes* problematic. For instance, the opacity of a folk or classical tradition to the young who have been alienated from it is a problem. But here it is the alienation, not the opacity that is at stake. Tagore's deepest concern is not an epistemological gap but a material lack. Tagore cares in the first instance about poverty and the absence of choice it engenders. An adequate standard of living and personal liberty, and the opportunity for creativity are for Tagore the fundamental human rights. Once poverty is eliminated, the citizenry can be trusted to choose their own lives, to

create their own future, supported by trust in one another, in a government that respects their individuality and, presumably in a progressive economic order that facilitates material, social and artistic development.

In America national habits and traditions have not had time to spread their clutching roots round your hearts. ... But in this present age of transition, when a new era of civilization is sending its trumpet call to all peoples of the world across an unlimited future, this very freedom of detachment will enable you to accept its invitation and to achieve the goal for which Europe began her journey but lost herself midway. "Nationalism," in Bhushan and Garfield 2011, p. 33)

So much for the social and the political regeneration of India. Now we come to her industries, and I am very often asked whether there is in India any industrial regeneration since the advent of the British Government. It must be remembered that at the beginning of the British rule in India our industries were suppressed and since then we have not met with any real help or encouragement to enable us to make a stand against the monster commercial organizations of the world. The nations have decreed that we must remain purely an agricultural people, even forgetting the use of arms for all time to come. Thus India in being turned into so many predigested morsels of food ready to be swallowed at any moment by any nation which has even the most rudimentary set of teeth in its head. India, therefore has very little outlet for her industrial genius. 34-35

Tagore's own romantic vision is that of a nation working in harmony, creatively united not by an abstract nationalism but by the concrete individual interests and goals of materially secure, freely developing individuals. For Tagore, then, specialization and expertise, and the division of labor modernity occasions, do not necessarily lead to alienation, or to an incomprehensibly complex life. Instead, the developments such a social order makes possible can in fact lead to a simpler life, and a life that facilitates greater understanding and contemplation of that which is worth understanding, precisely because one need not be concerned with, for instance, how one's sewing machine or medicine works. These matters can be entrusted to the relevant experts, whose expertise frees one to write poetry, to paint, to read or to write philosophy or even to play cricket.

Let our life be simple in its outer aspect and rich in its inner gain. Let our civilization take its firm stand upon its basis of social cooperation and not upon that of economic exploitation and conflict. How to do it in the teeth of the drainage of our life-blood by the economic dragons is the task set before the thinkers of all oriental nations who have faith in the human soul. It is a sign of laziness and impotency to accept conditions imposed upon us by others who have other ideals than ours. We should actively try to adapt the world powers to guide our history to its own perfect end. (35)

Tagore therefore sees *swaraj* in terms of human rights as we would recognize them today, and, like Bhattacharyya, *swadeshi* in terms of a healthy respect for one's own cultural traditions and heritage in the context of global interchange. Gandhi, on the other hand, sees *swaraj* in terms of spiritual or yogic discipline and *swadeshi* as an isolation

from that interchange. This is one way of putting the disagreement between Tagore and Gandhi.

We can put Tagore's point in another way, though, and putting it this way identifies a real tension in Gandhi's view, one to which we adverted earlier. This is a tension that, if faced, may indicate that the view is ultimately unstable, or even incoherent. We can look at this from the standpoint of *swaraj* first. Gandhi must be able to argue for *swaraj* as an ideal. His argument for its importance rests on fundamental claims about human beings as free, as self-determining. And these are conceptions of human beings that derive not from the *Gītā*, but from Rousseau and Locke. These ideals of freedom are ideals of *opportunity for self-development*, and indeed a great deal of Gandhi's own anti-modernist rhetoric, paradoxically, concerns the way the mechanization of life and abstraction of knowledge into the hands of experts *impedes* self-development for most of us. This is indeed one of Gandhi's deepest insights, and reflects his kinship with Tolstoy and Ruskin.

But in the end, Gandhi's rural utopia, as Tagore points out, sabotages the kinds of development many would most desire. For many of us, self-development is not found in cleaning toilets or spinning cloth; many of us want more for our children than rural poverty; and many of us think that what is distinctive about the human community is the possibility of intercultural communication and discussion, such as that in which we are engaged in this conference. What is one to do who finds medicine to be her calling, or the study of French literature? Or philosophy? Tagore and Bhattacharyya urge one to follow that calling, Gandhi to renounce it. Which kind of freedom do we want?

This is the difference between KC Bhattacharyya's conception of *swaraj* and Gandhi's, and the reason that Bhattacharyya is more aligned with Tagore than he is with Gandhi. Bhattacharyya, as we have seen, neither takes *swaraj* to be the extreme rejection of all ideas from outside, nor takes *swadeshi* to be cultural isolationism. Rather, each involves the critical engagement with all possible ideas, and the embrace of the possibility of progress, grounded in one's own cultures and values, but open to the appreciation of those of others.

Jay Garfield 4/17/11 4:38 PM

**Comment:** Need good quotations and references here.

It is wrong not to accept an ideal... simply because it hails from a foreign country. To reject it would be to insist on individuality for the sake of individuality and would be a form of national conceit and obscurantism. (108)

But equally,

The form of practical life in which an ideal has to be translated, has to be decided by ourselves according to the genius of our own community. A synthesis of our ideals with Western ideals is not demanded in every case. Where it is demanded, the foreign ideal is to be assimilated to our ideal and not the other way. (107)

On this account, self-mastery is the ability to imagine, not to restrict, a range of possible futures for oneself; nationalism is the commitment to develop, not to isolate one's own country, to advance its culture in dialogue with, not as an alternative to, the ideas and products of others.

This alternative approach to *swaraj* and *swadeshi* makes room for material development, but also for genuine human development, insofar as human development is facilitated by, rather than impeded by, open cultural exchange. It recognizes, as does Tagore in *Home and the World*, that Gandhian *swadeshi* comes with enormous costs, and that—just as Gandhi argued that *freedom* is not material but *spiritual*—these *costs* are not only material, but are *spiritual* as well. They involve the stultifying of intellectual, artistic and material development for anyone who seriously buys into them.

It is central to Gandhi's conception of *swaraj* and *swadeshi* that each represents the realization of fundamental human rights. The problem is that it is hard to get a discourse of human rights off the ground without the individualism, universalism and progressivism that characterize modernity. Gandhi seems to sawn off the branch on which he needs to stand.

## 6. Flushing the Toilets

At the end of *Untouchable*, which is at its core a novel about freedom, Mulk Raj Anand raises Tagore's question to Gandhi. Our hero Bakha is leaving the rally just addressed by the mahatma. He considers the three solutions he has encountered to the problem of untouchability. One possibility is conversion—the adoption of the alien Christian religion. A second is the Gandhian solution of *swaraj* for the untouchable within the bounds of the Indian context: the cultivation of *respect* instead of contempt for the degrading work of sweeping toilets, but not its abandonment. But there is a third route to

freedom: that of the poet—what poet could Anand have had in mind? Import the flush toilet.

We close as does Mulk Raj Anand:

As the brief Indian twilight came and went, a sudden impulse shot through the transformations of space and time, and gathered all the elements that were dispersed in the stream of his [Bakha's] soul into a tentative decision: 'I shall go and tell father all that Gandhi said about us,' he whispered to himself, 'and all that that poet said. Perhaps I can find the poet some day and ask him about his machine.' And he proceeded homewards.

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