

POLITICS, ETHICS AND THE SELF: RE-READING GANDHI'S *HIND SWARAJ*. By Rajeev Bhargava (Ed.). London and New York: Routledge, 2022. 353 pp.

Bhargava's edited book is possibly one of the most exhaustive texts to study M K Gandhi's seminal *Hind Swaraj*. The book, apart from its intriguing selection of authors, is significant in its possibilities of reading Gandhi, his philosophy, his language and his politics from diverse and unrelentingly rigorous academic perspectives. If we believe in what the book professes to do, that is assisting "scholars and researchers of peace studies, political philosophy, Indian philosophy, Indian political thought, political sociology and South Asian studies", it must be unusually rich in its academic sincerity, both at presentation and content, and the book safely appears to rise true to its claim. It indeed brings forth a multitude of ideological perspectives and possibilities of analyses; it explores the tensions within philosophy and navigates through the 'ethicality' of thought and language in one singular compilation of critical essays.

The book is a collection of some of the best minds who have taken up Gandhian scholarship, as profession or interest, over the last six decades. The promise of critical opulence may be gathered from the five, different parts that the text is divided into. To brief with a short catalogue of its rather impressing range of engagements, it will be necessary to skim through the textual sections in this book. The first part dives into Gandhian engagement with the question of civilization as a space for weaving worldviews and enquires upon the question of modernity, both as a civilizational project and a techno-temporal construct (under the title "The Truncated Ethic of Modern Civilization"). The second part deals with the problems of imperial expansion and violence ("Empire, Politics and Violence") with the following part looking at the broader issues with psychological and cultural colonisation ("Colonization of Minds"). The fourth part strikingly detours from these contemporary questions of global politics to a more individual quest of identity ("Cultivating Self") and the final section deals with the methods (if there is a concrete one) in reading the *Hind Swaraj* ("How to Read *Hind Swaraj*"). This act of deliberate mentioning the sectional details is mostly to acquaint readers with the exhaustive systems of thought that this book attempts to deal with.

What collects this rather sprawling and at times, baffling oeuvre of Gandhian scholarly works is Gandhi's own writings in the *Hind Swaraj*. Almost attempting to project the intense potential of and the relative interests at hermeneutic exercises, the book has each section fraught with writers who, without always consciously engaging with his counterpart, might have very well pushed open a never ending dialogue/debate with Gandhi and his same set of ethics that still haunts Indian political thought. The Indian civilization and its tryst with modernity have to do both with the imperial experience and a non-theoretical art of resistance. Of course India has witnessed countless philosophers, from Indic to Marxist and Nehruvian, who deal with a set of theoretical programmes to understand history, as it happens under daylight. However, the art of resistance or the question about the ever-eluding distance between *theoria* and *praxis* is perhaps never better talked about but in Gandhi's writings. And this too through a most non-theoretical epistemology. This is exactly what Anthony J Parel reflects on to be "original" in his "The Originality of *Hind Swaraj*". His classifications regarding what concerns the Indian political thought and a 'political thought in India' is instrumental in understanding the niche that Gandhi occupies in international political ethics. His elaborate tracing of what enables Gandhi to offer a decolonised notion of a society, his insistence on the twin notions of 'spiritual welfare' and 'bodily welfare' to chalk out the 'authenticity' of Gandhian thought is significant to begin the discussion in the book itself. Parel deals with the Dharmic thoughts that had formed the base of Gandhi's reflections on life and thus, seeped into his political grammar (Parel mentions the *purusharthas*) is a singular moment of understanding the very basis of Gandhian politics. L.I. Rudolph and S.H. Rudolph adds on to the discussion with their "Gandhi and the Debate

about Civilization” as they roll out the historiography of the development in Indian political philosophy. He reads the Orientalists, the Imperialists and the Utilitarians while engaging with the days of Bengal Renaissance as he swims across to the point when, he thinks, the Indian civilizational epistemology reaches its apotheosis in Gandhi’s *nishkarmic* politics.

Ajay Skaria’s text “English Rule without the Englishman” deals extensively with the notions of finitude/infinity, measurability/immeasurability that, as Skaria interestingly portrays, haunts Gandhi’s notion of *Satyagraha*. The notions of ‘sacrifice’, death and its offering to the hostile is surely a question on lines of sovereignty that places Gandhi in a much crucial realm of epistemic engagement. Akeel Bilgami returns to the question of modernity/anti-modernity and the ways to conceptualize radicalism in his “Reflection on Gandhi: Anti-Modernism”. In his text, Bilgami navigates through the currents of Marxist ‘primitive accumulation’, the lines of rationalist-idealist thought and touches upon the paradoxes of ‘reason’ and ‘faith’, thought, experience and superstition while engaging with Gandhi’s moments of crises. Nandkishore Acharya, too, proposes the dissolution of ‘ends’ in favour of contested ‘means’, albeit as a superiorly developed theory along lines of historical causality (in Gandhi calling the “economic” to be the “spiritual”) while reading Gandhi in his “Hind Swaraj: A Historical Necessity”. Similarly in “On Normative Structure of Gandhian Thought”, Satish Jain ‘discovers’ the “organic unity” that he collects from Gandhi’s ‘allegorical’ discourses.

The second part of the text contains Rajmohan Gandhi’s thoughts on the peculiar, almost overdetermined structures of violence and the nuances of *swaraj* and *swarajya*, the ambivalences of a quantitative theory in democratic states and the failures of liberalism that Fred Reinhard Dallmayr studies (in their “Empire and Violence or the Foes in *Hind Swaraj*” and “Political Self Rule: Gandhi and the Future of Democracy” respectively). Reinhard also concentrates on the “heuristic” notion of ‘nationalism that precludes “reification” while radically conceptualising Gandhi’s idea of the “oceanic circles” of societies against hierarchical forms. Uday Mehta’s “Politics and Violence” engages with Skaria’s thought and attempts to understand violence through nuances of the sacred and the retributive while Jeremy Weber understands Gandhi’s sense of “inclusionary and open nationalism” against ideas of hypernational jingoism and chauvinism that looks at the contention of differentially nuanced power structures.

A spectacularly intriguing piece comes from Boaventura de Sousa Santos in her “Learning from the South: Gandhi and Intercultural Translation”. Santos’ piece is perhaps the most nuanced of them all as she takes on to re-define the imperial North and the limitations (and hypocrisies) of the anti-imperial North. This includes her studies on the necessarily derivative, if not symbiotic, status of the Eurocentric discourses (both pro and anti imperial, anti racial and anti-patriarchal knowledge systems) while the author asserts upon the need for radical construction of newer models of thought and language based on ‘real’ expressions of the South. For this, the text refers to instances of the Zapatist movement, the Argentine *piqueteros* and the Gandhian *swaraj* while pointing out the lack of nouns in the otherwise adjective-driven lexicon of the anti-imperial North. It also categorizes three moments of resurgences: “the moment of rebellion”, “the moment of human suffering” and “the moment of victim-aggressor continuity” while relating to Gandhi in each of these phases. Shayal Mayaram, on the contrary, discusses the Indian philosophical notions against the liberal ‘progressive’ notions of the cultural debate (“Beyond Decolonising Knowledge: Revisiting the Swarajya’s in Debate”). To this already suggestive repertoire, Joseph Bara adds onto the question of modern education and establishes a dialogue with Gandhi in his “Gandhi and Political Praxis of Education”.

Keeping in line with the debate of decolonisation in relation to the self, Saheej Hedge elucidates upon a Derridian framework of looking at ‘writing’ and ‘philosophy’ while reading Gandhian idea of the “exemplary” against the “universality” of the Kantian categorical imperative and the operations of determinant and reflective judgements. His attempt is to look at Gandhi in terms of the open metaphor against the probabilities of a metonymic assertion. Gangeya Mukherji’s endeavour is rather brave and inciting where she vents into the interstices of imagination to consider what could

have happened to the Jews if they had really followed the much defamed and often ridiculed notion of *ahimsa satyagraha* in face of a ruthless Nazi power structure. She, surprisingly, establishes loopholes in Gandhi's critics and defends him through a thorough discussion of the Jewish condition while engaging with a commentator like Hannah Arendt ("Gandhi: Calling to Non-Violence Joined by Shy Pragmatism").

Hilal Ahmed in his text, "Afterlife of a Text: *Hind Swaraj* and the Chattisgarh Muktu Morcha" looks into the parallel situations that Gandhi faced in his times and looks for affirmation/negation/problematisation of pragmatics while engaging with at least three case studies with the CMM against industrial-political nexus. The result, as the author finds, is not completely in the negative. While the caste question (the Ambekarite debate) is re-engaged with in Sudhir Chandra's "Gandhi's Twin Fasts", Lucy Nusseibeh and Sari Nusseibeh in their "Sheherezade and *Hind Swaraj*" in a radical digression with the study of pragmatics, scuds back to the effect that non-violence in the form of stories could have against brute and corporeal violence, in a parable from the *Arabian Nights*. Apart from exploring the Indic notion of memory and oral story-telling, this essay looks at how 'force' can be re-defined through non-closed anticipation of a more communicable future. This problem of communicability is taken up in the essay by Tridip Sahrud when he deals with the etymological origins of Gujarati terms and looks at the transformation, both on a linguistic and semantic level, while translating them into English. His essay is extremely significant in understanding the subtleties of semantic progression/elision against the problem of 'language' that not only looks at the Chomskian idea of 'performance' and culture but moves beyond to locate meanings that were "non-existent".

This collection of essays and articles is not just significant to understand Gandhi and his writings alone but almost like its sprawling and exhaustive structure (and content), the book also vindicates the impossibilities of understanding a man to whom theory alone, in itself, was an impossibility. While many of the discussions are not very new to scholars and researchers working on Gandhi, this book might serve a very seminal role in collecting bits and connecting dots towards a failed totality, much like what Gandhi would have loved in his continual iterations and revisions towards his practical but ethical philosophies. The editor has evidently succeeded in presenting a text that might, with lingering doubt, make Gandhi more comprehensible as an entity but will surely claim the locus of confluence for an Indian and an anti-imperial system to resonate across global imagination.

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VERNACULAR ENGLISH: READING THE ANGLOPHONE IN POST COLONIAL INDIA.
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Translation is not an endeavour regarding the inter-communicability of language or semantics alone but a way of both construction and comprehension of one's self, the other and the world. This idea has caught the imagination of modern translation studies where the act of translation is being considered to linger within texts and extra-textual moments of recognition. Of course, it is about re-defining the very foundations of translation practices as what underlies 'expression' and its ethno-cultural dimensions of meaning and politics. In this regard, Akshya Saxena's text is one of the most fascinating studies on translation and extra-translational ways of perception. When I say, 'extra-translational', I also mean 'extra-textual'. In a way, the idea of a text and the act of translation has always been thought to be synonymous in literary practice. However, as Saxena proposes (and also substantiates) in her text, the idea of translation can expand from its common motifs of textuality and the act can pervade spaces that are least perceived or processed. That spatiality can be textually