



Gandhi: The Psychoanalyst of the Nation

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Gandhi's presence in the minds of Indians is unmistakable. His definitive and inimitable influence whether one agrees or disagrees with him and his principles, on the Indian psyche, are unequivocal. Gandhi's ideologies, his enigma as well as the controversies surrounding him continue, even after more than six decades of his assassination, find their mark in the Indian way of life. Ironically, it took a Westerner, more specifically an American to dwell into Gandhi's own way of life. Erik Erikson's 'Gandhi's Truth: The Origins of Militant Non-Violence' was the first and a brilliant attempt to decipher the mind of Gandhi- complete with his vulnerabilities, ambiguities, strengths and conflicts. Much has been spoken of understanding Gandhi through the psychoanalytical lens since then with renditions by more contemporary psychodynamic thinkers. These have often, though not always, drifted toward poking at Gandhi's sexuality and his struggles with his punitive superego and impulsive id. However, to assume that complicating a man's already complex sexuality and mind, is all that psychoanalysis has to offer for Gandhi would be an oversight of the potential of the discipline and of the individual. While analysis has its roots in uncovering intrapsychic dilemmas, it also has the ability to explain wider social and cultural phenomena.

This discussion of Gandhi as the Indian's analyst will bring to light not just some internal mental characteristics of this intriguing man but will also include a commentary on the traces of Gandhi in the Indian psyche. To this purpose, excerpts are borrowed from the likes of Ashish Nandy's writings who proposes four distinct 'Gandhis' that exist in different sections of the Indian society. In addition, and this is perhaps the thrust of this paper, is the discovery that the man who was Gandhi, by embodying the forces, frustrations, spirit as well as liabilities of the Indian mind, became the Mahatma. Much like an endearing psychoanalyst, Gandhi absorbed complexities of the Indian mind, held it within himself and in so doing became the object onto which India projected her inner conflicts. Gandhi reflected back to us, not our mayhem of dilemmas and perplexity but the possibility of peace and simplicity, thus in a curious way, adopting the position of an analyst vis-à-vis a client. It is then, in this process of transference of the Indian mind and counter-transference from Gandhi that has transpired and that continues, the ideals of the "Mahatma", and therefore by implication the principles of the Indian mind emerges.

Erikson's psycho-biography of Gandhi allows the reader to appreciate the various psycho-social conflicts that Gandhi appears to have battled with through many years of his eventful life. However, that's not all this remarkable piece of analysis does. Erikson offered many more points to dwell on which included the following two themes that in particular struck this reader.

Drawing parallels between Freud and Gandhi : As Freud once fancied he might become a political leader, so Gandhi thought of going into medicine. All his life Gandhi ran a kind of health institute, and Freud founded an international organization with the ideological and economic power of a movement. Both men came to revolutionize man's awareness of his wayward instinctuality and to meet it with a combination of militant intelligence and

nonviolence. Gandhi pointed a way to the "conquest of violence" in its external and manifest aspects and, in the meantime, chose to pluck out the sexuality that offended him. Freud, in studying man's repressed sexuality, also revealed the internalized violence of self-condemnation, but thought externalized violent strife to be inevitable.

The "truth methods" of psychoanalysis and of satyagraha do indeed represent "a convergence in human values which may well be of historical, if not evolutionary, significance"

Erikson suggests that satyagraha and psychoanalysis are counterparts: "by dint of always being a self-analysis paired with an attempt to understand another man's inner conflicts" ; because they both confront "the inner enemy nonviolently" ; because each "instrument of enlightenment" was forged "to include self-analysis, that is, the acceptance of himself as a person who shared [others'] inner mechanisms" ; "by replacing moral suppression with the belief that truth has enough force to make the patient [or the opponent] reveal what he had repressed". Through an incredible insight, Erikson brought together two men and their ideas that overtly appear in opposition to each other. This, the reader believes has been an important revelation to both- loyalists of psychoanalysis and those who identify themselves as 'Gandhians'.

Co creation of Satyagraha: The recognition of recurrent motivational themes in Gandhi's life history, and the demonstration of how they matured in satyagraha, though necessary for a psycho historical study, is by itself not sufficient to explain how it also met the needs of the followers in such a way that both the leader and the followers could make history together. The question arises that, if satyagraha can be shown to be an actualization of Gandhi's pervasive motivational trends, then how did it also develop into a historical movement which revitalized the Indian masses?

Erikson's answer to this is through the concept of identity, which in its core is both individual and social. Tracing the psychological effects of British rule and the effect of its economic, political, cultural, and spiritual policies in the damage done to the Indian identity, "the four-fold disaster" as Gandhi called it, Erikson shows that satyagraha not only actualized Gandhi but also actualized the followers by reconstituting their fragmented sense of identity which could be expressed and consolidated through the creation, or, rather, the re-creation, of "new" and specifically Indian institutions.

From Erikson's psychobiography of Gandhi, the first psychoanalytic understanding of the intriguing man, one moves to read the more recent renditions of Gandhi by psychoanalysts. Ashish Nandy wrote an obituary on the 50th anniversary of Gandhi's martyrdom that traces four 'kinds' of Gandhi in the minds of Indians today. As is typical of Gandhi himself, Nandy proposes a conflicting picture of these traces of Gandhi. He calls them troublesome as well as useful. Perhaps it is through the nature of these 'Gandhi identities' of being troublesome that their utility lies- what use can be a phenomena/ individual/ social construction that does not flutter feathers and question basic concepts? The first Gandhi that Nandy discusses is an 'absent' politician but a 'present' saint- this is the identity of Gandhi that India's political mind has adopted. By ascribing Gandhi the status of a 'Mahatma', the political mind of the Indians has neutralized Gandhi's ideologies as having potential for political application. This Gandhi has been constrained in idols and memorials built all over India albeit his philosophies of ahimsa, secularity and casteless society have become merely the sermons of a saint-who must, of course, be devoid of the worldly politics. This Gandhi is circumscribed-devoid of his life-long propagation of action, and is mocked every time a communal riot breaks out in India or whenever politicians exploit vote banks on

the basis of caste and religion. The second Gandhi is the 'intellectual' Gandhi- remaining alone in the intellect Indian's mind. This is another circumscribed manifestation of Gandhi and he lives off the first Gandhi. This identity of Gandhi exists in intellectual exchanges, in some symbolic actions (hand spinning of textile, rejecting anything remotely 'foreign' to further the propaganda of 'swaraj') and critical discussions of the pitiful state of Indian politics. The young Indian mind however is disillusioned with this Gandhi and seems disappointed in him. Gandhi was not just a man of introspection and dialogue but also a man of action- of initiative and agency (as has been discussed before while talking of Erikson and Gandhi). The action need not be determined by its popularity or magnitude- as is demonstrated by individuals like Baba Amte or Anna Hazare.

This second trace of Gandhi has left the youth of India somewhat distant from him and this is unfortunate because the second Gandhi hasn't broken the shackles of conference rooms and seminar halls to enter into the real life and real dilemmas of the Indian society. You and I, if we limit ourselves to these endless discussions like the present one and not convert thought into action, will be guilty of being proponents or embodiments of this second Gandhi.

The third Gandhi is perhaps more true to the original man and closer to his original ideals of 'swaraj' and 'satyagraha'. The ones who embody this third Gandhi are the sore points in what often appears to be the obvious road to development for our society/economy. They believe and act on the virtue of truth, many a times to the discomfort of the larger society or the state. They question, confront and compel their adversaries to reconsider. This Gandhi, who lives in the minds of an increasing number of Indians, is a cynic but also welcomes different vantage points. He is a menace to the common sense that passes as sanity but can be actually called, adapting an expression used by the founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, 'psychopathology of everyday public life'.

This Gandhi does not resemble the original Gandhi in appearance and habits as much as in action and ideology. Nandy cites the example of the likes of Medha Patkar who has fought tirelessly against the State endorsed Narmada dam. This is the Gandhi who has the courage that Gandhi himself possessed- of questioning and confronting the powerful with persistence and faith. Mr. Sanjiv Bhatt, an officer of the IPS cadre who took on the powerful and influential Narendra Modi in the state of Gujarat is perhaps another case in point of the third Gandhi.

This fourth Gandhi that Nandy enlists, in many ways, is similar to the Gandhi that is co-created as mentioned in the previous section of this paper. It is this Gandhi who is the beacon of hope, of strength, of endurance and promises success at the very end of the long, enduring road of non violence. This Gandhi is what people of India 'want' to see as real rather than the 'real' Gandhi himself. The man Gandhi wasn't free of ambiguity, self doubt or vices but then this Gandhi would be too real, too raw for the palette of the Indian mind which again finds itself at social, political and economic crossroads- much like at the time of British rule and its struggle for independence. Like Nandy says in his opening lines of this write up, perhaps it is not important to ascertain which the real Gandhi is. If the creation of a certain portrait of Gandhi in the minds of young India allows us to find purpose and direction, then why not?

The final section of this paper is on exploring this very fourth Gandhi that Dr. Nandy has also illustrated. As mentioned previously, the proposition that the 'Mahatma' and his

Satyagraha are phenomena that have been co-created by the Indian people and the man who was Gandhi, finds some worth. It was in fact this very idea of Erikson's and his attempt at drawing parallels between the discipline of psychoanalysis and Gandhi that became food for thought and struck me most. I asked- what purpose does building this picture of Gandhi as the 'mahatma' serve to the Indian psyche and society? What role does this Gandhi play for our scattered, conflicting and ambiguous social/personal worlds?

In analysis, the psychoanalyst has certain functions/roles, fulfillment of which is a major requirement for the success of therapy. The analyst is not looked at as a resolved, 'holier than thou' figure but instead as an individual with his/her own set of insecurities, fantasies, vulnerabilities and strengths. The therapist isn't expected to absolve her of her humanity but is meant to be 'aware' and 'conscious' of her fallacies. In the analytic situation, the therapist and client engage with each other at length and in depth- building a relationship marked with initial hesitation to trust. In this intense space, the client often attempts to revive or re-enact in relation to the analyst, situations and fantasies that represent the client's inner unresolved conflicts or needs. This is what is understood as 'Transference'. It's not an unwanted or an evitable process- it is bound to occur given the intimate relationship of the analyst and client.

A corresponding process also originates from the analyst. The analyst also, far from being 'perfect' comes into the therapeutic space with his own set of ideologies and fantasies. The totality of the analyst's psychological response to the client is what is termed 'counter-transference'. It is the interpretation of this mutual process of transference and counter-transference that draws out the shape of the product of therapy. It is in fact the therapist's ability to absorb, contain and reflect the client's often distorted or fragmented psyche into a more continuous, stable and healthy mind that becomes imperative for true healing to occur. The extent to which an analyst is able to keep a check on his own dilemmas, not allow it to blot the image projected by the client and echo back to the client the possibility of a more integrated and unwavering sense of self, is the mark of a good psychoanalyst. Having elucidated the requirements of a good analyst, it will dawn unto us, that Gandhi and his single most important principle of Satyagraha share many qualities of an analyst.

Just like Gandhi, the analyst also intends conflict resolution through non violence in the intra psychic space. Gandhi too intended resolution of conflict, whether internal or external through the method of non violence. Satyagraha- a method of mobilizing and recognizing the forces of truth and peace in the self and the other has four main characteristics-

- Engagement at close range with the other
- Refusal to violate the truth in the other
- Acceptance of self suffering
- The intention of 'saving' the other

All of these are also characteristics of a good psychoanalyst. The analyst, like Gandhi seeks the truth, revisits his own fallacies and insecurities repeatedly to stay aware of them and not allow them to creep into his role. Like Gandhi, the analyst accepts the client's rage, confusion and despair much like Gandhi absorbed the Indian psyche's fragmented, conflicted, under-confident state. The analyst contains the client to project back a picture of possibility and hope much like what the Gandhi we have created continuous to do for our nation.

Similar to an endearing psychoanalyst, Gandhi absorbed complexities of the Indian mind, held it within himself and in so doing became the object onto which India projected her inner conflicts. Gandhi reflected back to us, not our mayhem of dilemmas and perplexity but the possibility of peace and simplicity, thus in a curious way, adopting the position of an analyst vis-à-vis a client.

Gandhi then is the ultimate psychoanalyst to the Indian mind.

(This is an excerpt from the talk delivered by the reader at LSR for the team of students visiting from the Ohio Wesleyan University for an academic module on Gandhi)