

## **BEHAVIOURAL PROCESS IN THE INDIAN POLITY**

### **A MACRO RESPECTIVE**

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This paper discusses the unintended consequences of some events in the recent history of India. It does not seek to apportion blame, since this discussion is done in the light of hindsight. The sheer drama and power, the inherent dangers and problems facing a new born country would have blinded one to some realities and thrown up visions of great possibilities.

In the entire history of the world, there is only one occasion when an oppressed people obtained freedom through peaceful means. This unique distinction was the Mahatma's gift to our nation. Yet, barely four decades after this extraordinary event. India has lost its claims to being a peaceful nation. The grandson of Nehru has symbolised this fall, as evidenced by the violation of election codes and aggression upon the grandson of the Mahatma, in Amethi, in the recent Lok Sabha elections.

This recent event sharply brings into focus a stark question, and a vitally important one. Have we nurtured and cared for the gift that we received from the Father of our Nation? What is the India we are going to build and bequeath to our children?

The euphoria of gaining independence and embarking upon the efforts of nation-building has ended. The difficult task of creating a meaningful future stares us in our face. Our independence was won through the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, and independent India was led by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. These two leaders addressed the challenges in front of them in strikingly different ways.

Mahatma Gandhi took the movement sparked off by Lokmanya Tilak and converted it into a mighty wave. Tilak voiced the clarion call for Swaraj, "Swaraj is my birth-right and I will rest only when I have established it", he cried. Swadeshi was the means, through which this revolution was brought about. Mahatma Gandhi, understood the masses of Bharat deeply and took this call to them. His message was simple, direct and strongly rooted in Ahimsa and Satya, the two fundamental tenets of all religious thought in India. His method of fighting for independence was powerful and new. It was rooted in deep inner conviction, freeing oneself internally of all forms of domination and fragmentation. It drew its power from faith and purity. Both Tilak and Gandhi studied the ancient texts, drew inspiration from them and redefined their meaning in the context of their struggle, both personal and national. They re-anchored their insight in the institutions that were deeply rooted in the Indian Psyche. Dharma or peaceful protest against misuse of authority is an ancient institution in India. This mode of protest and assertion was given new vibrancy and life. However, Gandhi's concept of nation-building, after attaining independence was ignored by the powers that be in modern India.

Pundit Nehru believed in industrial progress. He advocated a direction for nation-building that was founded upon scientific and technological advancement. While believing in peace, he did not blind himself to military realities. His actions are best illustrated by his choice of bringing Le Corbusier to build a city that would symbolise New India. He

wished for a design that would inspire the nation. Though what Le Corbusier ended up creating was far short of Nehru's vision; a city totally out of touch with the socio-cultural milieu and living habits of the people.

Gandhiji and Nehru created two very different contexts for India's growth. One that called for a profound search into its own tradition and a development born of its own genius; the other called for a discontinuity, and sought to import the latest scientific knowledge to rate ahead into vision of modernisation.

### The Macro Processes

We must try and understand the processes, forces and movements that have all but wiped out the intensely human way of political action and replaced it with violence and untruth. I would like to advance the thesis that the overthrow of the Gandhian path is centred around two dilemmas. FIRSTLY, THE DILEMMA ENSHRINED IN THE IDEA OF THE OLD AND THE NEW; AND SECONDLY, THE DILEMMA OF THE PULL OF THE OBVIOUS AND THE TANGIBLE CONTRASTED WITH THE FAITH IN INNER CONVICTION, I.E., THE SYMBOL AND THE SEARCH. The macro movements and historic forces create the context of the times each one of us lives through. We do not always understand them, but we struggle with contrary pulls and pushes in our lives. We often leave our dilemmas unresolved in our selves and seek their resolution through heroic personalities who symbolise this conflict within. The symbols of the unresolved issues of our times are Mahatma Gandhi and Pundit Nehru.

Mahatma Gandhi inspite of his western education and contemporary background symbolised the awakening of the Indian masses. The 'half naked fakir' mobilised the hopes and the energies of the masses of our country. Every village reverberated with the gentle clicking of the charka. Leaders who responded to the call of the Mahatma arose spontaneously in all corners of the country. They questioned old norms, championed the emancipation of women and the ending of untouchability. The congress as an organised body drew its moral and institutional strength from Gandhiji's message. All the prominent leaders in the congress relied on Gandhiji's charisma. Perhaps because of his very intimate connectedness with the masses, his giving up of all ways of living that differed drastically from the common man, and because of his genius in anchoring his very revolutionary ways in the wisdom of the ancients, Gandhi came to symbolise the old. His insistence on Swadeshi was seen as a step backward into village India. His vision for India was considered impractical. As Swaraj became a reality, the organisation of the congress party turned its back on the more fundamental principles enunciated by the Mahatma.

Pundit Nehru on the other hand was the cultivated anglicised Indian who came to "Discover India", the modern day Columbus. His understanding of India was derived from study of historical movements. He was the archetype of the educated elite of the country. Educated entirely in England, he represented the supreme sacrifice of the person who had acquired a very viable westernisation giving up the opportunity to exploit his learning. He symbolised the new, the secret desire of the Indian to be accepted as equal by the coloniser; the need for the Indian to be confirmed and appreciated from the western point of view. The compulsive need of the victim to be dignified and loved by the oppressor found its champion in Pundit Nehru.

Prof. Pulin Garg calls them “the Hero and the Counter Hero of today’s India.” That Nehru was a protégé of Gandhi does not diminish the differences between the two as persons and as leaders. The fragmentation between the old and the new, and the contrary pulls of the search and the symbol are personified by them.

What is the nature of this fragmentation? What energies do they mobilise? What processes do they unleash?

### The Old and the New

Every action choice that man makes goes hand in hand with creating opportunities to develop some aspects of himself and society while suppressing and submerging others. When choices of social organisation and cultural norms get established, this pattern of opportunity and suppression become a living condition. The individual processes find reflection in the societal processes. Some groups end up with privileges and others become under-privileged, just as each individual finds legitimacy for contempt. Changes in such conditions could come from within or from the outside. Such changes are often heralded by extraordinary individuals who rise above the given reality and have deep insights into the negatives of the contemporary conditions. In India such resolution and renewal have always come from saints and sages. People who have risen above the norms and traditions of the time but deeply rooted in an inner spiritual human quest. From the times of the Buddha and Mahavira, the Upanishadic Sages through to the Bhakti saints and Suri Mystics, this has been India's path. Gandhi walked the path of this tradition. But, the political condition of the time gave his action an added dimension. Social change was superimposed by the obvious struggle for power and freedom.

At the threshold of a change, the words old and new take on very powerful emotive meanings. The old represents all the dark, unenlightened, dead conformities, unquestioned norms, unexamined beliefs and the like that oppress man. The old is the past that must be left behind.

The new represents bright, intelligent, progressive, free and inviting spaces, fresh beginnings that give hope to man. The new is the future destiny that beckons each person and he must embrace it with both arms.

The language of the leaders of such times get heavily laced with the vocabulary, imagery and mythology of this fragmentation. The energy that the 'new' can mobilise is directly related to and dependent upon the oppression experienced through the "old". When the vision of the new is founded upon a deeply human, compassionate and spiritual base, it takes the form of a self propelling wave. It sweeps millions of people and spans vast times. The Buddha’s words still ring fresh in our ears. But, when the call for the new is superficial, when it relates only to externals and is based on intellectual forecasts it can only mobilise opportunism, escape and a scramble to acquire the material benefits arising out of the change. Without the deep inward energy of truth and compassion, it will not move man. The act of gaining independence created a very powerful context in which the "old and the new" became the operative metaphor. Unfortunately, it also represents a discontinuity between the direction created by Gandhiji and the direction chosen by Nehru. A deep inward search gave way to a superficial vision.

The struggle for Swatantra and Swadeshi decayed into a superficial change; an opening up of opportunities for a changed order of power and wealth. The evidence for this lies in the fact that except for the colour and nationality of the rulers having changed, there is very little change in the process of governing our Nation. The laws follow the colonisers precedent. The government bureaucracy has not changed in structure in its mission, or its norms and culture. The Educational patterns remains largely unaltered, even the books and the rendering of the History of the nation remain the same. Industrial Organisations operate with imported knowledge and alien management philosophies. They are becoming the leading edge of a mind colonisation. But, access to political and economic power has opened up, the societal balances between castes has changed. Thus the more opportunities and violent have grabbed the new instruments of power. Some of the earlier struggles for political and economic power were played out within the bounds of values and dignity. Today the forces welling up to grab a piece of the cake, act from a named lust for power. The frustration caused by a belied hope in the emergence of a truly developmental context adds fuel to the fire.

The call for building a new scientific India that Nehru voiced, has become a wave for consumerist industrialisation and economic and technological opportunism. Gandhi is associated with village industry which is looked at as a pious responsibility. Apart from keeping alive Khadi Gramodyog Bhavans and co-operative textiles, the idea of village development has been forgotten. The pioneering work of Nelly Setna, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya and Pupul Jayakar has not led to the revolution in village technology that one expected. New age textiles rule the day.

With the relegation of the old, a whole host of Indian tradition languishes. The metaphor and practice of science and technology in India, the continuity of village crafts, the regeneration of Indian design in architecture and art have all been marginalised. The owner of a westernised training in technology holds the power and makes decision. An indigenous scholar in any field of learning has to languish and be at the mercy of the new breed of petty officials and managers.

A new intellectual middle class has joined a new power elite to usher in a bastardised western modality of growth and development. This attempt would be welcome were it possible to cut oneself off cleanly and completely from ones background and ones heritage. But since that is clearly impossible both individually and collectively, the disturbance caused by the superficial call for the new and in our case, for westernisation, technologisation and politicisation can only unleash self centred, power hungry reactionary forces.

The metaphor of the old and the new is not only false in the sense that it fragments the reality of the here and now, it is false also because it creates a context for action that is hollow and unsubstantial. It evokes mirages, superficial non enduring action and short term gains. It takes ones attention away from the real issues of the here and the now. The metaphor of Gandhiji was based on confronting the truth, introspection, self purification and assertion without aggression or violence. Satyagraha compelled one to stay with the burning human issues, delve deeply into an exploration of the condition of the present, in the now, and discover ones response to it and act powerfully but peacefully. The new in his vision, is an unfolding and flowering of this quest.

## The individual's dilemma : The Search and the Symbol

Let us take a closer look at these processes that compel an individual to respond to rapid change. Change in the technology of living, in political, economic and social order place enormous strain on people. A culture of transience sets in and the imperatives of transitions to new ways of living unleashes deep anxieties and fears. This outburst of feelings is a powerful force. When this force cathects to a movement that is a deep search into ones tradition and history it leads a wave of meaningful and peaceful change. In the absence of such an institutional space, this force becomes cathartic and violent. It clings to symbols of past glory and stability. The movement is superficial but it provides safety in membership. The following and leaders of this movement are terrified of abandoning the external anchors that seem to provide security belonging and identity.

A movement from a past into the future challenges beliefs and cultural traditions very deeply. Through the ages, through successive invasions into India, the indigenous culture has been through many shocks. But, we have always found ways of assimilating the new people who came in and their philosophy. Their identities were never threatened while space was given for a new social balance. The beautiful story of how the Parsees found a new home in India illustrates this strength of our people. The external norms and practices were never the source of conflict. The ability to act from deep faith, humanness and dignity for the self and others was the central issue. A Dharmic existence and code was the demand. The institutions of search were vibrant.

The changes that have come in the wake of the Independence seems to have altered all this. Let us look at the case of Ayodhya. For may years (as far as living memory goes), the spot now claimed as Ram Janma Bhoomi has been the place that thousands of devotees would visit around Ramanavami day. Earlier there was a stone to mark the spot and early in this century a small idol was installed. Whatever the historical events that led to the Babri Masjid being built, the tradition of simple folk visiting the Ram Janma Bhoomi carried on in a peaceful way. It lived through uncomplicated faith and no communal tensions have resulted from it till recently.

Today it has become a symbol of a resurgent Hindu psyche! Have we regressed so far in our thinking that events that are almost a thousand years old have become powerful reminders of hurt? The word Hindu was coined by 16<sup>th</sup> century Jesuits. They had to define the religious phenomenon they wished to attack and conquer. How come we have internalised both the word and the need to attack another faith in order to proclaim our own?

The forces that have been set into motion, during the years leading up to the independence, have crystallised into this psyche. A psyche that has forsaken simple dignified faith and looks for external symbols of membership and identity. The very disturbing faith and looks for external symbols of membership and identity. The very disturbing trend here is, the penchant for Mathadhipatis to encourage politically instigated communal forces. Perhaps, this is seen as a way of stemming the rot that is setting in today, in the majority community. Surely, blessing bricks that will build a symbol of domination is not the way to religious renewal. The simple institutions that have kept the Sanatana Dharma vibrant are dying. To illustrate, the institution of either digging a well, or planting and looking after a tree to celebrate an auspicious happening

in the home is a distant memory. Many a prominent citizen in Mylapore, has the institution of the 'Vaara Sooru' to thank. Just two generations back, many of our grand-fathers were fed one meal a day and provided with books to study, by the more fortunate in their community. Revitalising these institutions, ought to be a far more important task for these leaders. Using their position and authority, to re-establish the institution of 'Vaara Sooru' and extend it to adopting Harijan boys would do far more to the Dharma, than creating symbols. It would address itself to the oppressive ills that have come to stay in the religion. It would initiate change internally and not force the under-privileged to look else where to find opportunities for growth.

The more regressive processes that are rampant today could be the ripening of the sentiments that marginalised Gandhi during and immediately after 1947. The forces of integration and living in mutual dignity that Kabir, Guru Nanak, Chaitanya, Appar and a host of bhakti saints had nurtured has given way to the divisive designs of the coloniser. A people whose faith in the Divine was kept alive by the words and lives of saints and sages, have given allegiance to dogmatic priests and mullas. The trust in inner conviction and the power of truth gave way to outer conformism and the power of violent demand. The symbol was obliterated the search. This then is the deeper dilemma triggered by the forces of history; the dilemma of choice between introspection and discovery in the face of the challenges on the one hand and a blind clinging on to symbols of security on the other hand.

#### The relationship between the dilemmas

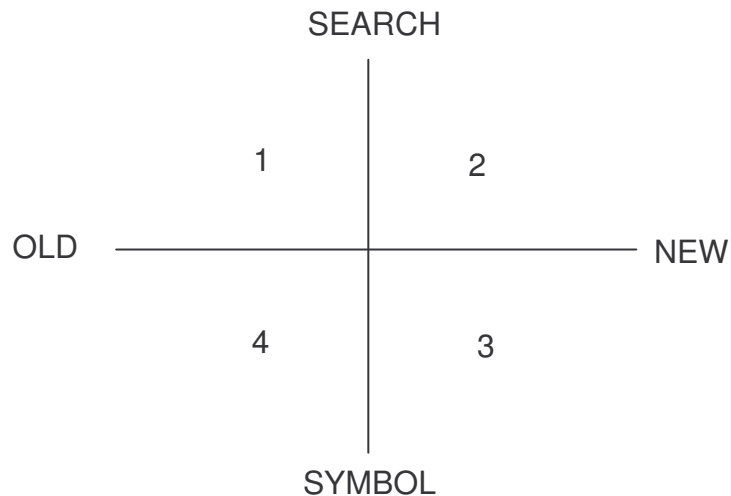
The processes in the realm of the psyche closely parallel the processes that led to change in political and economic power. Gandhi was a deeply religious man. Nehru was a modern intellectual. Gandhi evoked the faith and trust of a people. Nehru spoke eloquently of a vision of new Indian that touched the dreams of the elite.

The old and the universe of faith have much in common. They are experienced in ones feelings and are seldom given form. Articulating them and defining them are almost impossible. They are a quiet background upon which one acts out the drama of ones life; their strengths are implicit and taken for granted while their negatives are explicit and call for attention. Ones being is soaked in them while ones thoughts and dreams roam free. One awakens to them only when they are lost and one feels empty within.

The political and religious dramas that have burst upon us in the recent past must surely touch each one of us. While neither of them are desirable both of them reflect our own inner processes. They seem superficial and external in their expression but reveal an erosion of human values in general and the cultural positives of our country in particular. The corruption and violence that we see in the political arena, reflects our own compromises for economic gains and beliefs in being aggressive in a competitive world. Yet, we had won our independence, on the power of a different belief. The dogmatism and fundamentalism in the religions spheres, reflects our own erosion of faith, our very superficial attitudes to human values, our desperate search for external symbols, and to balance inner insecurity. Yet, we placed faith in Ahimsa and Satyagraha, only a few years ago.

## Advancing a Conceptual Map : A Gist of the Discussions

To understand the thesis put forth here, let us look at a conceptual map of the processes discussed. One axis of the map is the myth of the 'old' and the 'new'. The other axis is the nature of the action that people find security / meaning in, i.e., the search and the symbol.



Transition from one technological mode of survival and social / political organisation, to another, creates an extraordinary amount of anxiety and insecurity. In traditional agrarian societies, like India, which have experienced centuries of stability and prosperity – the metaphors, meanings, symbols of the tradition, get deeply entrenched in the minds of the people. A passive acceptance of the givens, sets in, negative experiences and feelings generated by the socio-psychological context, i.e., feelings of relativity / anger and helplessness at the given conditions get contained in conformity and conservativeness. The vibrant, alive body of people, end up holding on to empty norms and forms. This is where we find India in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (quadrant 4 in the map).

In order to regenerate and develop, the spark and the seed have to come from within the body-politic. Institutional spaces that evoke a sharing of pathos and encourage an exploration into one's living context, provide the ground from which the seeds can develop, grow and transform a society. Such institutions are like a compost pit where the decaying part can nourish an emerging future. They are the places of intense introspection and search of the community, where empty forms and encrusted, over-crystallised, dead symbols are examined and the living sparks and seminal wisdom, indigenous to the community is discovered. Mahatma Gandhi had created such an institution starting from Tilak's cry for Swarajya, Swadeshi and Swatantra. He evolved the method of Satyagraha, which made the Congress party, an institutional space. Not only did he constantly articulate his insights about the political reality, but also delved deep into religious texts of wisdom; discovering the essential principles and strengths of its living core. He initiated a cleansing of the old stream and gave it a new movement, a new force and direction. His mode of search and action closely resembles the modes of the sages and social reformers of old, like the Buddha, Guru Nanak, Kabir, etc. He expanded the scope for right action into the political field also. He created an institution

capable of providing the security and the context, where the transition from old entrenchments to development and growth could take place. A living transition, where the future is not a dream, or a vision, but an unfolding and a flowering of introspection and assertion. This institutional space covers quadrant one and two of the map. The sheer genius, wisdom and compassion of this attempt of Gandhiji defy description.

In the absence of such an institution, the call for the 'new' must rely on evoking dreams and hopes, and be fuelled by euphoria. Nehru became the symbol of this movement and the force. The context for his leadership was set by the totally alien political canvas, that the constitution of India created. A political manifesto having no link with the struggle and institutional processes, symbolised by Gandhiji. The context of his action was constrained by the continuance of colonial organisations and the law. The vision of the 'new' did not touch the heart of the Indian people, the way Gandhiji's call had. It provided opportunities for new forms of power, a new economic order and enterprise. The ferment created by the struggle for independence was left orphaned. Its more fanciful aspects were given space. The feelings that would have nourished the seeds sown by Gandhiji, were left without leadership. The more self-serving interests found space and opportunity for acquisition. Thus, we find many of the political and economic initiatives taken in the 50's giving way to more violent, profiteering leadership and entrepreneurship, in the late 60's. The philosophy of action is not national growth, it is power, money and violence. Today, they are visible in brutal starkness. The quadrant 3 represents this pull.

When the Congress party decided to assume political power, by a quirk of fate, or a sleight of hand as it were, the people of India were rubbed of a most magnificent experiment. The institution that saw Swaraj as one of the consequences of its struggle, became an instrument of power. The institution that mobilised commitment to a new awakening, was converted into a conduit for power. The people located in the old metaphors have no alternative, but to turn neurotic, violent, fundamentalist, conservative, survival oriented etc. in order to contain this anxiety and insecurity in the face of change; a change brought in from the outside, in an alien form and vehicle. This is represented in quadrant 4.

### **Can we build new Institutions for today?**

There are many questions we as a nation and each one of us as individuals must confront. With our action and inaction alike, what kind of a world are we creating? Do we have a philosophy and belief that are human or have we become instruments of acquisition? Our nation holds in its bosom the traditions of all mankind's greatest thinkers - do we learn how to integrate them and draw great resources from these treasures or are they going to become the seeds of fragmentation and violence? Can we forsake the false myths of the 'new' and delve deep within ourselves, our background and our heritage, to find creative answers to our problems? Can we be truly scientific and rigorous by investing in exploration for knowledge and understanding, and stop being imitators and borrowers? Can we stop looking for compromises in politics and in societal processes, and plunge deeply into discovering meaningful resolution? Can we stop looking for grandsons of Heros and Counter-Heros of yesteryears to give leadership and assume responsibility for our own futures?

The dilemmas we face are crippling. There is only the present, in which one can be alive to the simultaneity of birth and death. Nothing is left behind, there is nothing waiting in the future. One carves one's destiny, by being sensitive and responsive to the present. The tangible in human struggle is always superficial. It can at best be an instrument for manipulation. Vibrant energy always arises from inner faith and conviction. A few people have kept the Gandhian struggle alive. Baba Amte is the most prominent one. There are many small groups and individuals scattered all over the country keeping the search alive. We need to find ways to converge and broaden these attempts.

Amethi and Ayodhya throw up a whole host of questions and a new threshold in our development. The longer we take to answer the challenge, the more entrenched will the cancerous processes we see today, become. Do we go on from Swaraj into becoming a desh, Swadeshi and Swatantra; or do we decay into fragments, remain *paradeshi and paratantra*? Can we discover new institutions of faith and quest, meaningful for today?

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