

**The Subversion of the Colonial System of Humiliation:
A case study of the Gandhian Strategy**

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The premise of this paper is that the colonizer institutionalizes humiliation as a strategy to control the colonized. It is also an inevitable consequence of the power dynamic of the relationship between the colonial master and the colonial subject. This culture and system of humiliation lends support to colonialism. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's philosophy of non violence to free India from British colonialism witnessed a conscious incorporation of a strategy to subvert this system of shame and humiliation. His ingenuity lay in transforming into objects of pride the very features and characteristics of Indian society that were referred and used by the colonizer as sources of humiliation. Most importantly he saw humiliation as a systemic creation and not a whim or character aberration of individual Englishmen. Gandhi's untypical strategy had a moral high ground, even as it sought to end the dehumanization of the Indians, particularly, the poor, it claimed to rehumanize the British by liberating them from the psychosocial decay of colonialism.

Academic and popular discourse view shame and humiliation as leading to violent responses from their victims, creating an endless cycle of violence in which the victim-offender circle is constantly enlarged as the hitherto *unconnected* individuals are ensnared into a situation not of their *own making*. At a certain point of this process there are no *neutral* bystanders, the entire society is involved. In the era of McLuhan's village the scale of society is global. This possibly explains why even as the defeated and the vanquished are clearly visible today, the victors are not.

Gandhi had foreseen these (and other) flaws as inherent in a violent response. The enduring relevance of Gandhi's experiment continues into the twenty first century, irrespective of whether his ideas are practiced or not. The act of revisiting Gandhi is not simply a nostalgic walk down memory lane; especially so when it is compelled by the need of the hour.

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'Let not the 12 million Negroes be ashamed of the fact that they are the grandchildren of slaves. There is no dishonour in being slaves. There is dishonour in being slave owners. But let us not think of honour or dishonour in connection with the past. Let us realize that the future is with those who would be truthful, pure and loving. For as the old wise men have said, truth ever is, untruth never was. Love alone binds and truth and love accrue only to the truly humble'. M.K.Gandhi.¹

The above statement reflects cognitive lenses which are forward looking, non retributive and restorative. The phenomenon of humiliation is criticized, not denied; human life is so highly valued that it is not anchored in frozen 'negative' frames of history. There is also here a gesture to the logic of cyclical violence, thereby decoding the essence of life as truth and love.

This paper seeks to discuss the institutionalization of humiliation as a strategy by the colonizer to control the colonized and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's intervention to subvert this system of shame and humiliation. This task is undertaken by discussing *some* incidents from Gandhi's personal life and *some* aspects of India's situation under the colonial rule.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was acutely conscious of not just the overt but also the less obvious humiliating dimensions of colonialism for the colonized. Gandhi's battle was with both the realm of colonial consciousness and its structural contexts. His ambition was to liberate both the colonized and the colonizer from the colonial mindset. Decades later the wisdom in the Mahatma's observation would find affirmation in the academic world of sociologists and psychoanalysts who now speak about the cultural and psychological pathologies of the colonizers. Aime Cesaire refers to the 'decivilization' of the colonizers². Examining the mindscape of colonialism in India, Ashis Nandy points

¹ This message was sent on May 1, 1929 by Gandhi to Dr.W.E.B. DuBois, editor of *The Crisis*. He had requested an article from Gandhi.

² 'The colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as *an animal*, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform himself into an animal...They thought they were only slaughtering Indians, or Hindus, or South Sea Islanders, or Africans. They have in fact overthrown, one after another, the ramparts behind which European civilization could have developed freely.' Aime Cesaire quoted in Nandy, Ashis *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* Delhi, OUP, 1983. pp.29-30.

out that for Gandhi 'freedom is indivisible, not only in the popular sense that the oppressed of the world are one but also in the unpopular sense that the oppressor too is caught in the culture of oppression'(Nandy, 1983, p.63).

In his public life which began in South Africa, Gandhi became acutely conscious of and concerned about the humiliating treatment given to the Indians by the colonizers. In a chapter titled *What It Is To be A 'Coolie'* in his autobiography, he feels compelled to give a brief outline of it. In the Orange Free State the Indians were deprived of all their rights. They could reside there only as waiters or do similar menial jobs. The Indians could enter the Transvaal only after paying a tax of three pounds. They could not own land except in locations set apart for them. The right to vote was denied to them. They were also not allowed to walk on public footpaths, and had to stay indoors after 9pm.(Gandhi, 1960, p.63)

In the very first week of his arrival in South Africa, Gandhi encountered the blatantly discriminatory and humiliating side of colonialism. As he traveled from Durban to Pretoria on a first class ticket, Gandhi was thrown out of the train because a white passenger objected to his presence in the compartment. Similar racial insults were launched at him as he continued his uncomfortable journey. This personally traumatic experience of color prejudice was but the start of Gandhi's rapid awakening³ to the insulting and degrading conditions in which his compatriots were forced to live. Also their quiescence in the face of injustice and prejudice did not escape his notice (Brown, 1989, p.31).

The practice of humiliation by the colonizer

Humiliation is a strategy to mask the unjust and exploitative nature of an oppressive activity. It seeks to dis-empower and disable its victim. It assumes many forms; verbal and nonverbal. The practice manifests in social, cultural, economic and political contexts. It is most powerful in the realm of ideas where it 'discourses' itself as legitimate. This legitimacy makes humiliation appear as a just desert, thereby making opposition to it illegitimate.

The argument of the 'civilizing mission' was colonialism's attempt to seek legitimacy for an enterprise that was essentially exploitative. The ideological hegemony of the colonizer justified it almost as a humanitarian act. It was argued that the native had to be freed from the 'heathen' practices and customs. They had to be got out of the quagmire of superstitions and anachronisms. The colonies were looked upon and understood as backward and primitive, in need of guidance to the path of modernity.

³ Even as he sat shivering in the waiting room, Gandhi reflected on his future course of action. He concluded that it would be cowardice to *run back* to India without fulfilling his obligation. 'The hardship to which I was subjected was superficial-only a symptom of the deep disease of colour prejudice. I should try, if possible, to root out the disease and suffer hardships in the process. Redress for wrongs I should seek only to the extent that would be necessary for the removal of colour prejudice. So I decided to take the next available train to Pretoria'. (Gandhi.1960.p.141)

Colonial prejudice: Two examples

1. Indians are devoid of any concept of truth

This ethos and belief is most dramatically captured in the speech of Lord Curzon (1859-1925), Viceroy of India. Speaking at a convocation ceremony in the University of Calcutta, Curzon said that the Indians lacked truthfulness, implying that they were devoid of any concept of truth whatsoever. He went on to say, ‘the highest ideal of truth is to a large extent a Western conception’ and ‘undoubtedly truth took a high place in the moral codes of the West before it had been similarly honored in the East, where craftiness and diplomatic wile have always been held in much repute’(Chatterjee, 2005, p.75). The medium (the context of the occasion and that of the official status of the speaker) was designed to lend legitimacy to the message. The aim of the speech was also to instill shame in the audience of young graduates about their heritage. One can reasonably speculate that many of them may have been tempted to adopt the path of obsessive imitation. This way they could avoid feeling belittled. Western education was viewed as making them superior to the *other* Indians. Thus the problem of colonialism in India got further compounded by the creation of the phenomenon of inner colonialism. Indians were becoming a house divided.

Gandhi reacted to Curzon’s offensive speech with a reply rich with references from different Hindu texts, in each of which truth is highlighted. Noteworthy is the range of references made by him: ‘untruth is to be conquered with truth, truth is a pathway to salvation, salvation is to be found in Him who is the infinite ocean of truth, right speech is truthful speech, truth is a duty, virtues are forms of truth, untruth is what is not in the heart where truth abides, there is the abode of the Lord, truth dwells in Sri Krishna.’(Chatterjee, 2005, p.76).

2. Indians lack aesthetics

The Orientalist stereotyped the colonized as being bereft of any sense of aesthetics⁴; they either lived in dirt and squalor or believed in an ostentatious and loud lifestyle. And Gandhi set out to challenge them both by pointing that neither was an inherently Indian trait. An anecdote is relevant here. Soon after his meeting with the British Monarch Gandhi was asked by a journalist about whether he was embarrassed about not being dressed in appropriate formal clothes. Gandhi replied that the King was wearing enough for the both of us. The profundity of Gandhi’s witty remark was not lost on anyone. The subtext of his statement read that the opulence of the monarchy came at the cost of deprivation of the Indians, particularly the poor.

⁴ It would be pertinent to note here the ‘re landscaping’ of the Taj Mahal that the British administration undertook. The Moghul sense of aesthetics was one in which the garden symbolized paradise, one which touched all the five senses. The British were dismissive of it, for e.g. they cut the trees and foliage that ‘blocked’ a ‘clear’ vision of the Taj. The Mughal sense of subtlety and beauty of ‘gradual unveiling’ of the monument was lost on them.

Of course the critique of the colonizer never stopped him from turning the critical lens on his own society. For example, his emphasis on hygiene and clean toilets is well known. At the first Indian National Congress Convention that he attended, he picked up the broom and started to clean toilets. He remarked that if the Convention had continued for more than three days it would have been the beginning of an epidemic. Gandhi emphasized that respect for one's surroundings entailed taking ownership and responsibility.

In his critique of western civilization, Gandhi commented upon its inherent ugliness (or lack of aesthetics). He pointed out that colonialism was the inevitable logic of such a civilization. How could there be beauty in a way of life that led to exploitation of workers, increased the pauperization of the peasantry and encouraged conspicuous consumption among the few even as the majority struggled to get their basic meals? He was inspired by Tolstoy's views on art. For Tolstoy art as an activity must be seen in conjunction with other important human activities. It cannot be separated from notions of goodness and truth. It has to be judged by internal and external criteria. The latter involves the assessment of art's ability or lack of promoting feelings of love and human solidarity. According to Anthony J. Parel, the reinvention of the symbol of the spinning wheel by Gandhi was an artistic invention of the first order. It communicated values of - solidarity between the rich and the poor, manual labor, and appropriate technology (Parel, 1998, p.xxxvii). It will also be pertinent here to point out the visual eloquence in the quiet beauty and simplicity of his ashrams.

Between the upholder of the principles of nonviolence and the coercive colonial state's violence and killings, who is the aesthete? Gandhi's credentials are unimpeachable.

Politics of language and the politicization of education

The introduction of English as a medium of instruction widened the gap between the educated and the masses. Lord Macaulay is credited with the introduction of an education system in India that was essentially geared to meet the needs of the British Raj. Gandhi described it as a system that produced an army of clerks and office seekers. It had dried up all originality, impoverished the vernaculars and deprived the masses of the benefit of higher knowledge which would have otherwise percolated to them through the intercourse of the educated classes with them. The indigenous systems of knowledge were marginalized and labeled unscientific and backward by colonialism. His argument for the irrelevance of the British system of education in India can be understood in the critique of western civilization that he makes in *Hind Swaraj*. He pointed out the significance of agriculture in the Indian context and how there was no training for it. He was critical of the over-literary and foreign *character* of the syllabus. He favored instead a study based on spiritual values along with practical training. In the practical training of students Gandhi also saw an opportunity for the school to be financially autonomous. For example the school could sell the products made by students in a carpentry class.

Gandhi's recommendation that the vernaculars be made the medium of instruction had a political rationale. He realized that as English became the language of power, the non-English/ vernacular gradually ceased to be a means of political expression, thereby rendering the majority of the Indians without a political voice. With this loss came another, i.e. their loss of autonomy as political actors (and protesters); they now required interpreters to articulate their views and problems. These interpreters most prominently were the western educated moderate leaders of the Indian National Congress. And as with all translations there were problems of the original meaning and nuances getting lost. The average Indian discovered that her concerns and problems, as articulated in the national political arena level were either diluted or had become dissociated and abstracted from her reality.

This was also a consequence of the centralization of power in the Congress Party. Gandhi sought to rectify these flaws by democratizing the Party so that each individual Indian could be politically active and independent.

It is in this context that we must understand what appears at first glance a contradiction in his thoughts. In addition to proposing the vernaculars as medium of instruction, Gandhi emphasized the need for a national language. This was a politically astute policy recommendation. For national mobilization Indians needed to communicate with each other. English was not the option for him because of its association with social exclusiveness and its implied political and cultural rejection of the Indian heritage. His preference was for Hindi as spoken by north Indians, Muslims and Hindus, which could be written in the Devanagari and Persian scripts. This would necessary for the construction of a national identity (Brown, 1989, p.107).

Mimetic desire and the loss of the self

The Indian society was hierarchical but colonialism created new dynamics for it. Education created a new elite in the Indian society, one which sought to disassociate itself from the other members. It was also the process in which the elite were, as Gandhi was to point out, getting alienated from themselves. Gandhi himself underwent this process very early in life. In the very aspiration of being a brown sahib, there was a loss of dignity and self esteem. Colonialism gave to the Indians a new 'cultural script' (Kaufman, 1992), one in which being successful entailed the aspiration to be a brown sahib. The Indian elite were beginning to live vicariously, constantly looking for approval from the colonizers. Dennis Dalton describes this as a lethal process of trying to gain self respect in a way that only brings alienation. He quotes extensively from Gandhi's writings to make this point.

'The clothes after the Bombay cut that I was wearing were, I thought, unsuitable for English society and I got new ones..I also went for a chimney-pot hat costing nineteen shillings-an excessive price those days. Not content with this, I wasted ten minutes every day before a huge mirror, watching myself arranging my tie and parting my hair in the correct fashion. My hair was by no means soft, and everyday it meant a regular struggle

with the brush to keep it in position. Each time the hat was put on and off, the hand would automatically move towards the head to adjust the hair, not to mention the other civilized habit of the hand every now and then operating for the same purpose when sitting in polished society. As if all of this were not enough to make me look the thing, I directed my attention to other details that were supposed to go towards the making of an English gentleman. I was told it was necessary for me to take lessons in dancing, French and elocution.’ (Dalton, 1996, p.6).

Gandhi saw the need to challenge this ideological hegemony of the British *and* to devise alternative ways of seeing and being.

Gandhi realized that the battle against colonialism could be won only if the Indians were conscious of not just the ‘everyday’ imposition of humiliation by colonialism but its illegitimacy. He searched for indigenous sources of self respect. But at the same time, unlike some of his contemporaries, he did not want to whitewash India’s pre colonial history and hark back to an *imagined* golden era. He knew the trap of transporting into the contemporary the ills of yesterday. Therefore, he defined indigenous culture, religion, beliefs and values as dynamic not stagnant. Moreover, they had to be evaluated and assessed from the point of view of humanism and reason. Antiquity did not automatically qualify as a virtue. Therefore, constant criticism was essential.

Gandhi privileged a culture of critique. To encourage this ethos he set an example by self criticism. His autobiography and newspapers were not a context of self eulogizing or articulation of pretentious and false modesty but an acknowledgement of his weaknesses and the tortuous but successful process of overcoming them. Self criticism gave him the legitimacy to demand that of the others. Gandhi, thereby, created a *public sphere* in which the ‘commoner’ could participate in the national dialogue.

It is in this democratic space that he changed his earlier statement God is Truth to Truth is God. Truth had to be pursued, even though its complexity made possible only its partial grasp. Pursuit of truth required a multi dimensional perspective which necessitated a dialogue and conversation with other viewpoints. Self critique was a significant factor in giving the national movement a mass base. Self critique enabled the dilution of social hierarchies, making possible for a new category and identity, that of an Indian, to emerge. This national identity did not mean the extermination of linguistic, religious and ethnic identities only their hitherto antagonistic relationships. With the diminishing of internal divisions, there was lessening of distrust between the Indians (which so far the British had cleverly exploited and exacerbated through what came to be known as the divide and rule policy). As the Indians were brought closer there was a lessening of hatred and humiliation amongst them.

The sartorial revolution

The master communicator that he was, Gandhi did not lose or waste any opportunity to transmit his message. The evolution of his own sartorial style and his *engineered* national sartorial revolution would be an interesting case study for the students of the image management industry. Two observations from his autobiography are a case in point.

1. Gandhi, after much deliberation decided to wear the turban in the court in South Africa. This gesture was well thought out, one which signaled that the colonized would not be culturally assaulted (Gandhi, 1960, p.136-137).⁵

2. At the Viceroy's durbar, Gandhi noticed how the Indians were compelled to imitate the white sahib. However, this imitation did not transform their status as one of equality with the colonizers. There was a hierarchy that they had to respect; the imitation could not be better than the original. So the 'dolloed up' Indians ended up looking like *khansamas* i.e. waiters in trousers and shining boots. He also recounts the durbar of Lord Hardinge where the Indian Rajas and Maharajas *had to*⁶ bedeck themselves with jewels, swords with golden hilts (Gandhi, 1960, p.284). It was the showcasing of exotic captives of the imperial state. The nuance was not lost on Gandhi.

It is in this context that the plain white khadi⁷ dhoti acquires a revolutionary meaning. It cocked fingers at British imperialism. Men and women and not just members of the Congress party gave up wearing foreign cloth and took to the homespun khadi. To borrow from the popular Levis jeans ad, "*The jeans that built America*", one could say that khadi was the cloth that clothed the Indian National movement. More than one British officer and politician has remarked on Gandhi's sartorial style. Winston Churchill's *half naked fakir* epithet is all too well known. Perhaps, he was one of the first to grasp that as Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi met the British Monarch at the Buckingham Palace, in walked with him the poorest of the poor. A piece of cloth became an audacious symbol of protest. Khadi obviously had a strong economic rationale. It meant the revival of cottage industry and the crippling of the foreign textile industry. Clothes are also cultural markers of wealth and status, but as more and more Indians adopted khadi, it led to the internal democratization of the Indian society. It is interesting to note that white was the color the 'inauspicious'⁸ widowed Hindu woman was expected to wear. But thanks to the politics of khadi, this disempowering aspect of the cultural marker vanished.

⁵ 'The question of wearing the turban had a great importance ..Being obliged to take off one's Indian turban would be pocketing an insult. So I thought I had better bid goodbye to the Indian turban and begin wearing an English hat, which would save me from the insult and the unpleasant controversy.

But Abdullah Sheth disapproved of the idea. He said, 'If you do anything of the kind, it will have a very bad effect. You will compromise those insisting on wearing Indian turbans. And an Indian turban sits well on your head. If you wear an English hat, you will pass for a waiter'.

There was practical wisdom, patriotism and a bit of narrowness in this advice. The wisdom was apparent, and he would not have insisted on the Indian turban except out of patriotism; the slighting reference to the waiter betrayed a kind of narrowness...

On the whole I liked Abdullah's advice....

My turban stayed with me practically until the end of my stay in South Africa'. (Gandhi 1960.pg.136-137).

⁶ Gandhi was told that it was obligatory for them to dress up like that. (Gandhi.1960.p.284)

⁷ Khadi is the cloth that is made from the thread made from the spinning wheel.

⁸ The widowed woman, particularly if she is young, is still considered inauspicious in some parts of India.

The politics of khadi through the *charkha*⁹ economized on existing resources and simultaneously expanded the resource pool of the national movement. It liberated the mind; there was pride, not humiliation, in the wearing of this coarse fabric.

Transformation of the self as a necessary prelude to national liberation

Gandhi stressed on the transformation of the individual as a prerequisite for reaching the goal of national freedom. In his book, *Hind Swaraj* which is a dialogue on swaraj (self rule), he delineates a clear link between inner life and outer achievement. For him individual regeneration and national regeneration constitute one continuum. Gandhi would, therefore, exhort those skeptical of his ideas to first emancipate themselves; emancipation of India will automatically follow (Parel, 1998). The spiritual component in this exhortation is obvious, but Gandhi was also an ‘intensely practical’ (Parel, 1998, p.lxii) man, he realized that economic empowerment was imperative. Therefore, his struggle and philosophy were marked by an integrated approach. The head, heart and the hand were not separated. His reification of manual labor as bread labor can be understood in his desire to end the parasitism of the rich. By addressing the problems of social hierarchy and wealth disparities, Gandhi sought to avoid the violence inherent in class conflict. Gandhian politics were politics of accommodation.

Political Imprisonment: The new social mobility

Prisons have always been associated with shame and loss of self esteem. Prisons ‘teach vice and foster criminality’ (Cayley, 1998, p.2). Opposing the British through the means of civil disobedience entailed being arrested and going to jail. Gandhi made the act of imprisonment not a source of shame but a matter of pride and dignity. There are interesting metaphors that he employs in this context.

- ‘We must widen the gates of prisons and we must enter them as a bridegroom enters the bride’s chamber’ (CWMG, 1966, p.10).¹⁰
- ‘The Government takes advantage of our fear of jails. If only our men and women welcome jails as health resorts, we will cease to worry about the dear ones put in jails which our countrymen in South Africa used to nickname His Majesty’s Hotels.’ (Dalton, 1996, p.74).
- ‘..we must treat arrest as the normal condition of the life of a non-co-operator. ..we must seek arrest and imprisonment as a soldier who goes to battle seeks death.’ (Dalton, 1996, p.74).
- ‘Our triumph consists in thousands being led to the prisons like lambs to the slaughter-house. If the lambs of the world had been willingly led, they would

⁹ A spinning wheel.

¹⁰ *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol.22, Dec.1921-March 1922) Delhi: The Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1966.p.10.

have long ago saved themselves from the butcher's knife...The greater our innocence, the greater our strength and the swifter our victory' (Dalton, 1996, p.74).

Gandhi described this as the absolute efficiency of innocent suffering. His astuteness lay in recognizing that in the absence of fear and resistance on the part of the *satyagrahi* while courting arrest, the power of the mighty colonial state would be powerless. The power equation between the oppressor and the oppressed (and humiliated) will, thus, be altered. A prison term now qualified one to a badge of courage and honor. For thousands of *satyagrahis* such an opportunity afforded a privilege to become instruments in the liberation of their nation. In post-independent India there is in the recounting of many a family history a proud reference to the jail term served during the national movement by a grandparent, parent or relative.

Nonviolence as a subversive strategy

Gandhi believed that unlike the victim, the nonviolent practitioner suffers with dignity because she is enlightened with the knowledge that suffering is the law of human beings; war is the law of the jungle. '...suffering is infinitely more powerful than the law of the jungle for converting the opponent and opening his ears, which are otherwise shut, to the voice of reason'. Imagine the scale of psychological transformation that Gandhi was able to bring in the average Indian's mindset and perception about herself. The meek and weak attitude was jettisoned, there was consciousness about the immense reservoir of power that *each* Indian had within herself. The colonial instruments of humiliation began to be revealed to the British as sources of shame and humiliation for their *own selves*. Note that this humiliation was not imposed by the Indians on the British. The strategy of nonviolence forced the British to look into the mirror. Q.E.D. It was a self revelation for them, of course with a little help from Gandhi. The cycle of violence (which may have ensued from the response of the newly humiliated) was thus avoided. The strategy of nonviolence revealed the barbaric nature of imperialism, yet humanized the individual British men and women. Note that this was done much before 'humanizing the other' became the fashionable vocabulary in the dictionary of conflict resolution. Inspired by Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr expressed the same thoughts when he said that in the struggle for first class citizenship, second class methods to gain it must never be used. 'Our aim is not to defeat or humiliate the white man, but to win his friendship and understanding' (Carson, 2005, p.505). Pointing out the futility of the cycle of violence, King remarked, 'Along the way of life, someone must have sense enough and morality enough to cut off the chain of hate' (Carson, 2005, p.124-125). Of Gandhi, he said,

'Gandhi resisted evil with as much vigor and power as the violent resister; but he resisted with love instead of hate. True pacifism is not unrealistic submission to evil power. It is rather a courageous confrontation of evil by the power of love, in the faith that it is better to be the recipient of violence, than the inflictor of it, since the latter only multiplies the existence of violence and bitterness in the universe, while the former may develop shame

in the opponent and thereby bring a transformation and change of heart.'(Carson, 2005, p.122-123).

The strategy of nonviolence stressed upon dialogue in drawing attention to the flaws in the assumption of superiority of the colonizer. Through debate and argument the *humiliator* is exposed and denied the veneer of legitimacy. The humiliated is empowered to not just oppose the system of humiliation but also transform the individual humiliators who are now viewed simply as mere instruments. 'I am not anti-English; I am not anti-British; I am not anti-any government; but I am anti-untruth—anti humbug and anti-injustice. So long as the Government spells injustice, it may regard me as its enemy, implacable enemy'(Dalton, 1996, p66). As a means of communication non violence had an additional advantage; it, of course, spoke to the British State but it also forced the people in not just Britain but all over the world to listen. To paraphrase Marshall McLuhan, the medium (of non violence) itself was the message.

Nonviolence as a response to the hypermasculine colonial violence?

If one were to take a **gendered** view of violence, then one can understand that the inherent masculinity entailed in acts of subjugation labels its victims as emasculated, weak, cowardly and unmanly. To be a coward is to be like a woman. Gandhi on several occasions, like most other Indian leaders including Jawaharlal Nehru and Swami Vivekanand, viewed colonizism as an insult to Indian 'manliness'. But his response was not *dictated and determined* by this discourse. He countered by feminizing politics. He redefined manliness as possessing several qualities hitherto associated only with women. The symbolism of salt and charkha were far from being masculine. Contemporary conventional wisdom dictates that women in order to succeed and break the glass ceiling have to be 'more like a man'.¹¹ However, Gandhi's successful *satyagrahi* had to be more like a woman.

In this context, Ashis Nandy's analysis is pertinent. He points out that 'the colonial culture's ordering of sexual identities assumed that *Purusatava*>*Naritva*>*Klibatva*. That is, manliness is superior to womanliness, and womanliness in turn to femininity in man.'(Nandy, 1988, p.52) The first Indian response to this was to accept the ordering by giving a new salience to *Kshatriyahood* (warriorhood) as true Indianness. Gandhi's solution used two different orderings, each of which could be used according to the context. The first was that manliness and womanliness are equal, but the ability to transcend the man-woman dichotomy is superior to both, being an indicator of godly and saintly qualities. Gandhi's second ordering was that the essence of femininity is superior to that of masculinity, which is better than cowardice (Nandy, 1988, pp.52-53).

On the accusation of Indians being cowards there is an interesting response by Gandhi in *Hind Swaraj*.

¹¹ Indira Gandhi and Margaret Thatcher, former Prime Ministers of India and the UK have been individually referred to as the 'only man in the cabinet'.

'Macaulay betrayed gross ignorance when he libeled Indians as being practically cowards. They never merited the charge. Cowards living in a country inhabited by hardy mountaineers, infested by wolves and tigers must surely find an early grave. Have you ever visited our fields? I assure you that our agriculturalists sleep fearlessly on their farms even today, and the English, you and I, would hesitate to sleep where they sleep. Strength lies in absence of fear, not in the quantity of flesh and muscle we have on our bodies' (Parel, 1998, pp.44-45).

Gandhi constantly underscored the fact that non violence was *not* the weapon of the weak. If the only choice available was between cowardice and violence, he advocated violence.¹²

Conclusion

Gandhi's genius lay in transforming into objects of pride the very features and characteristics of Indian society that were referred and used by the colonizer as sources of humiliation. Gandhi's faith in human volition was the source of his belief that there are no dead ends in life. Therefore, he could undertake the task of challenging the mammoth system of colonialism. He confronted the colonial imposition of humiliation in its myriad manifestations. His strategy symphonized aesthetics and ethics in the practical world of politics. And in all this truth was his trump card. The openness and 'no secrecy' of his venture gave no tactical advantage to his opponents; it only left them more confused. The 'weaponless *humiliated*' changed the rules of the game which the oppressors had no skills to deal with. As the latter made an exit from the colonial field, they found an offer of a handshake from the victors, their former victims. The gesture was generous and was accepted. In this acceptance was a decline by both to be mired in the vicious violent cycle of humiliation.

There is in this a lesson for the actors of the drama called terrorism and counterterrorism.

¹² 'I would rather have India resort to arms in order to defend her honour than that she should in a cowardly manner become or remain a helpless witness to her own dishonour'. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol.18, July-Nov.1920, Delhi: The Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1965. p.132.

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