

Gandhi and the Authority – An Examination in Anarchist Tradition

Dr. A. Raghu Kumar
avadhanamraghukumar@gmail.com

On 15 August 1947, when the crowds were swarming into New Delhi from all sides, and Nehru was about to deliver one of the finest speeches on such a great dawn, reminding the people of India of the culmination of ‘the tryst with destiny’ long years ago the people of India had made, “*The first uncertain sputtering of a candle had appeared in the windows of the house on Beliaghata Road just after 2 a.m., an hour ahead of Gandhi’s usual rising time. The glorious day when his people would savor at last their freedom should have been an apotheosis for Gandhi, the culmination of a life of struggle, the final triumph of a movement which had stirred the admiration of the world. It was anything but that. There was no joy in the heart of the man in Hydari House. The victory for which Gandhi had sacrificed so much had the taste of ashes, and his triumph was indelibly tainted by the prospects of a coming tragedy. ... ‘I am groping,’* he had written to a friend the evening before. ‘*Have I led the country astray?*’¹ How do we understand this person who refuses to rejoice in his own offspring? What binds him or refuses to bind him to any particular pleasure?

“*All interpretations of India are ultimately autobiographical*”, says Ashis Nandy.² In understanding Gandhi, and his philosophy, his struggles within and without India, the trajectory of his life, and the culmination of his nonviolence in the assassin’s bullet is not just autobiographical or biographical of Gandhi; it has, in fact, become an inalienable part of Indian history. There are several readings of Gandhi, at several layers, including a facet which explains him as unconventional, atypical and always relating himself with an authority disobligingly. From the first biography of Gandhi written by Joseph J. Doke, a Christian missionary in South Africa in 1909³, there are several incisive readings and roving inquiries into his life from various angles and philosophical standpoints.

Some such important readings include Romain Rolland’s *Mahatma Gandhi*⁴, Erikson’s *Gandhi’s Truth*⁵, Pannalal Dasgupta’s *Revolutionary Gandhi*⁶, Manu Gandhi’s memoir⁷ – *Bapu - My Mother*, Louis Fischer’s⁸ *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, Robert Payne’s⁹ *The Life and Death of Mahatma Gandhi*, and Ashis Nandy’s¹⁰ *The Intimate Enemy*. The list is not exhaustive, but indicative of exploring unknown depths of this presumably spiritual maverick. Any one, at the initial reading of his autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*,

¹ Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre, © Larry Collins and Pressinter, S.A., 1975, *Freedom at Midnight*, Tarang Paper Backs (Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd), p.262-3

² Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*, Oxford University Press, 1983, p-80

³ Doke, Joseph J., M.K.Gandhi, *An Indian Patriot in South Africa*, 1909, Indian Chronicle, London

⁴ Romain Rolland’s *Mahatma Gandhi: The Man who became One with the Universal Being*, Translation from the French by Catherine D. Groth, Publications Division, Govt. of India, 1924, 2004

⁵ Erik H. Erikson, *Gandhi’s Truth: The Origins of Militant Non-violence*, © 1969 W.W. Norton & Company. Inc., New York

⁶ Pannalal Dasgupta, *Revolutionary Gandhi*, Translated from Bengali by K.V. Subrahmonyan, Earthcare Books, Kolkata, 2011

⁷ Manu Gandhi, *Bapu - My Mother* Ahmedabad, Navjivan, 1949

⁸ Louis Fischer (1951), *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, HarperCollins, 3rd impression, 2008

⁹ Robert Payne, *The Life and Death of Mahatma Gandhi*, Rupa & Co., © 1969, 1997 by Sheila Lalwani Payne

¹⁰ Ashis Nandy, *op.cit.*

would arrive at an idea of Gandhi as primarily a law-abiding citizen. His family legacies, his loyalties to the British rule time and again, and his ambivalences even till the early phases of the Second World War lead us to such derivatives. But Gandhi also makes a parallel contra-reading. All his life was a continuous and long struggle against '**authority**' – authority of every kind! All his understanding of religious texts such as Bhagavad Gita, caste or class, swaraj, modernity, freedom, liberation of the individual or society, rights and duties, the concept of Truth and God, nonviolence, brahmacharya, health, food, community living etc., defied the reasoning of known epistemology. To cite one, he said once: '*Freedom is often to be found inside a prison's walls, even on gallows; never in council chambers, courts and class rooms.*'¹¹ Was Gandhi an anarchist or iconoclast internally, while externally offering a different posture?

In the list of anarchists at *wikipedia.org* we find the name of Gandhi as one standing with the insignia of "*anarchist*" along with Proudhon, Mikhail Bakunin, Peter Kropotkin, William Godwin, Emma Goldman, Tolstoy and Bhagat Singh etc. Gerald Runkle¹² writes: "*The essence of anarchism is individual liberty. ... Anarchism thus opposes authority in all its forms; government rule, social constraint, religious domination and moral compulsion.*" ... '*The anarchist, as Proudhon proclaimed, accepts no master, recognizes no sovereign*'. The idea that Gandhi was an anarchist has always been contested by most of his adherents. But his life provides for humongous evidence of his strained relationship with every '**authority**' from childhood to his last breath, an inalienable ingredient in anarchist thought. Another problematic area in this description has always been the conceptual connotations of the very word – 'anarchism'. The historical experience of the West with anarchism has been awfully brimming with the overtones of violence. However, even in anarchic tradition of the West there are certain subaltern layers of non-violence.

George Woodcock¹³ considered 'anarchism' as a doctrine which poses a criticism of the existing society and strives to change it. "*All anarchists deny authority; many of them fight against it. But by no means, all who deny authority and fight against it can reasonably be called anarchists. Historically, anarchism is a doctrine which poses a criticism of existing society; a view of a desirable future society; and a means of passing from one to the other.*" But there are some basic features common to many, if not all, anarchists: refusal to establish systems, naturalism, deeply moralistic tendencies, anti-historicism, apolitical or anti-political approaches, direct and individualistic action, rejection of or suspicious outlook towards all forms of government or authority etc.

But the difficulty now revolves also around understanding '**authority**'. The idea of 'authority' has undergone a great change. 'Authority' manifests in different incarnations in the course of a modern man's life, not just in 'the King' or 'the priest' as in the pastoral societies. We may locate him in a parent, a teacher, an employer, a policeman, a judge, a leader, a guru, a caste-head etc. Consequently we have as many counter-shades of antonyms also. Many a time, we may not challenge the authority; we may just escape its sovereignty. The escape, sometimes, may also be in the form of art, literature, spirituality or in an appeal to the something unknown

¹¹ Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre, p-50

¹² Gerald Runkle, (1972), *Anarchism Old and New*, Delacorte Press / New York, p.3

¹³ George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A history of Libertarian Ideas and Movements*, © 1962 World Publishing, New York, p.9

higher. We need to negotiate with the ‘authority’, mostly unavailingly. Gandhi’s theory and activity were constructed, undoubtedly, mostly around moralistic or spiritual normative.

Very early in Gandhi’s career, Sir C. Sankaran Nair¹⁴ [1857-1934] [who was the President of the Indian National Congress for 1897 and a member of the Viceroy’s Executive Council for 1915] had accused Gandhi of being ‘*an anarchist*’ in an essay titled ‘*Gandhi and Anarchy*’. Anthony J. Parel rejects this claim as unfounded and presents Gandhi’s harmoniously constructed philosophy of modern State in his work. At the end of Dandi March on 06.04.1930 – Mrs. Sarojini Naidu¹⁵ hailed him as “*Law breaker*”. The Right Hon’ble V.S Srinivasa Sastri¹⁶ also described Gandhi as a “*philosophical anarch*” who could not be swayed by rational arguments. Gandhi himself described his utopia as ‘*enlightened anarchy*’ contends Vinit Haksar.¹⁷

In fact, Gandhi’s life appears to be a series of such violations of the conventional authority or wisdom. From childhood, in many of his acts, we find a typical discordant, while apparently being an obedient person. Erikson¹⁸ cites an anecdote from Gandhi’s early childhood: “... *for when his father was not there, he was inclined to usurp strange rights. He would remove the image of the ruling Prince from its customary stool and put himself in its place, a habit of pretending to be his father’s master ...*” Raja Rao¹⁹ quotes another anecdote: ‘... *and once it’s said, he even took one of the idols from their sacred seats, and placed himself in the god’s place*’. Gandhi’s decision to go to London to pursue law ended up in the caste elder-men passing a gag order against him: “In the opinion of the caste, your proposal to go to England is not proper.” Hinduism had long held taboo against travelling beyond sea. *Gandhi said to them that he would nevertheless go. He replied firmly: “I think the caste should not interfere in the matter*”. Consequently the headmen ostracized Gandhi: “***This boy shall be treated as an outcaste from today***”.

There were three Englands, by then, within England – England in England, England in India, and England in South Africa. England in England is a very sophisticated nation through the *Enlightenment* awakening of the eighteenth century. Most of the Indian renaissance is the result of our intellectual contact with this England. But England as a colonial power was always different. England in South Africa is no sophisticated State rather it was a State with all prejudices – color, class etc. This is the specific additional element which enriched Gandhi’s approach towards the England. His journey from Durban to Pretoria and the incident that occurred at Pietermaritzburg where he was removed from first class compartment on the insistence of a white man is well-known and was a turning point of his life. It is now in the deep memories of many Indians and even the Westerners thanks to the great film of Richard Samuel Attenborough of 1982. This is not the last experience to Gandhi of a different England and a different Whiteman. Fischer²⁰ raises the question: ‘Why, of all people, did it occur to Gandhi to

¹⁴ Anthony J. Parel (2006), *Gandhi’s Philosophy and the Quest for Harmony*, Cambridge, p-56

¹⁵ D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma – Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, Publications Division, Govt. of India, 1961, 2018, Vol-3, p-31

¹⁶ Robert Payne, *op.cit.*p.390

¹⁷ Vinit Haksar, *Gandhi and Liberalism, Satyagraha and the conquest of Evil*, South Asia Edn, Routhedge, Oxon & New York © 2018, p.224

¹⁸ Erik H. Erikson, *op.cit.*, p.108

¹⁹ Raja Rao, © 1998, 2004, *The Great Indian Way – A life of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vision Books, Preface, p.39

²⁰ Fischer, p.58-59

resist the evil?’ and tries to answer it: ‘... Was it this inherent *anti-authoritarianism* that made him rebel against the government color line? ... Was it destiny, heritage, luck, the Gita or some other immeasurable quantity?’

The white man always relied on some kind of slavery. With the demise of European feudalism, conditions became increasingly unfavorable to the institution of slavery; maintaining slaves was expensive, and a growing population increased the availability of cheap labour, making slavery economically less favourable. When the slavery was found economically and morally indefensible, the England had adopted innovative methods. One such was the ‘*indentured labour*’ intelligently introduced in South Africa, in the guise of contractual freedom of the labourers. During 1890-1 some 150,000 Indian emigrants were settled in South Africa, most of them having taken up their residence in Natal. “*Semi-barbarous Asiatics*” was the description of Indians of South Africa in the statute books. Though by religion they were different formulations, the White racial arrogance put them in the parenthesis of a common nomenclature “*coolies*”; all Indians were known as “coolies” or “sammiss” i.e., “coolie merchants”, “coolie clerks”, “coolie barristers” etc. It is in this process of understanding the different England in South Africa, unknown to the Indian students in England or USA or Germany, he underwent a transformation in his life and philosophy. Here he was also introduced to the writings of Tolstoy and John Ruskin.

Within a week of his arrival he visited the Durban court. The magistrate asked him to take off his turban which he refused to obey and left the court promptly. Some newspapers described him as an “**unwelcome visitor**”.²¹ During the year 1894 the Natal Government sought to impose an annual tax of £25 on the ex-indentured Indians. Gandhi campaigned against the law, and the struggle which started in 1893 had gone up to the end of 1914. It is here Gandhi experimented with his method of struggle – ‘*means*’, i.e., ‘*satyagraha*’ for the first time in 1907.

In Transvaal during January 1908 in the agitation against compulsory registration of Indians, Gandhi and his colleagues were once summoned to the court. The questions and answers in the trial between the Judge Mr. Jordan and Gandhi make an interesting reading:

Jordan: The question is, have you registered or not? If you have not registered this is an end of the case. If you have any explanation to offer as regards the order I am going to make, that is another story. There is the law, which has been passed by the Transvaal legislature and sanctioned by the Imperial Government. All I have to do and all I can do is to administer that law as it stands.

Gandhi: I do not wish to give any evidence in extenuation and I know that legally I cannot give any evidence at all.

Jordan: All I have to deal with is legal evidence. What you want to say, I suppose, is that you do not approve of the law and you conscientiously resisted it.

Gandhi: That is perfectly true.

Jordan : I will take the evidence, if you say you conscientiously object to the law.

²¹ D.G. Tendulkar, op.cit., Vol-1, p.36

Gandhi asked for the indulgence of the Court for five minutes but Mr. Jordan refused to grant it. “**You have defied the law**” he bluntly said.

Gandhi: Very well, Sir, then I have nothing to say.

Jordan : Leave the colony within forty eight hours. That is my order.

Gandhi refused to comply with orders. So on January 10, 1908, Gandhi and others who attended the court for sentence ‘pleaded guilty’ to the charge of disobeying the order to leave the colony. The magistrate sentenced Gandhi to two month’s simple imprisonment. “*The role of a political prisoner is far more honorable than that of a lawyer,*” he declared. *This was his first prison experience.*

Gandhi returned to India in January, 1915. The first exhibition of the rebel in him on Indian soil occurred on 4 February, 1916 at Hindu University Central College (now Benares University). The ceremonies were attended by illustrious and glittering persons such as the Viceroy, bejeweled maharajas, maharanis and high officials apart from Mrs. Besant and Malaviya. He spoke in such gathering about the poverty of India, comparing the richly bedecked nobleman with the millions of the Indian poor counterparts. ‘*There is no salvation for India unless you strip yourselves of this jewelry and hold it in trust for your countrymen in India*’. He declared ‘our salvation can only come through the farmer. Neither the lawyers, not the doctors, nor the rich landlords are going to secure it’. There was a commotion. Mrs. Besant repeatedly ordered Gandhi to close his talk. The Viceroy, the maharajas, the noble officers left the meeting one by one.

From then on, in all his interventions, whether it was Champaran movement in the cause of indigo farmers (1917), or the stike in the cause of Ahmedabad Textile workers (1918), or the subsequent movement of ‘boycott of foreign goods or cloths’, civil disobedience movements during 1921-22, or at Bardoli (1928) or the Salt March (1930) or the Quit India movement (1942), *he was giving the British Authority, the concrete proof that their might, hitherto dreaded and unquestioned, could be challenged by Indians.* Gandhi was arrested on 10 March, 1922 on the charges of sedition for his three articles written for Young India. The first one appeared in Young India dated 19 September 1921, titled ‘*Tampering with Loyalty*’. ‘I have no hesitation in saying that it is **sinful** for anyone, either soldier or civilian, to serve this government.... *Sedition has become the creed of Congress....Non-cooperation, though a religious and strictly moral movement, deliberately aims at the overthrow of the government, and is therefore legally seditious...*’ In the second article, ‘*A puzzle and its solution*’, dated 15 December, 1921, he wrote ‘*Lord Reading must understand that non-cooperators are at **war** with the government. They have declared **rebellion** against it...*’ The third one ‘*Shaking the Manes*’ dated 23 February, 1922, opens with the most challenging sentence: ‘*How can there be any compromise whilst the British lion continues to shake his gory claws in our faces?*’ He further added: ‘**No empire intoxicated with the red wine of power and plunder of weaker races has yet lived long in the world.**’ ‘*The fight that was commenced in 1920 is a fight to finish, whether it lasts one month or one year or many months or many years. ...*’.

At the preliminary hearing of the case he was asked to state his profession and he declared it as 'farmer and weaver', and as usual pleaded guilty. '**The Great Trial**' was held on 18 March, 1922 before Mr. Justice C.N. Broomfield, District and Sessions judge. After the charge was read out by the Advocate General, the judge asked Gandhi whether he wished to make any statement. He had a ready written statement. The statement read: '*The Advocate General was entirely fair.... It is very true and I have no desire whatsoever to conceal from this court the fact that to preach disaffection towards the existing system of government has become almost a passion with me*'. He concluded saying: '*I do not ask for mercy. I do not plead any extenuating act. I am here, therefore, to invite and cheerfully submit to the highest penalty that can be inflicted upon me for what in law is a deliberate crime and what appears to me to be the highest duty of a citizen. The only course open to you, the Judge, is, as I am going to say in my statement, either to resign your post, or inflict on me the severest penalty if you believe that the system and the law you administer are good for the people. I do not expect that kind of conversion, but by the time I have finished my statement you will perhaps have a glimpse of what is raging within my breast to run this maddest risk that a man can run.*' '*I came reluctantly to the conclusion that **the British connection had made India more helpless than she ever was before, politically and economically**..... I have no doubt that both England and the town-dwellers of India will have to answer, if there is a God above, for this crime against humanity which is perhaps unequalled in history*'. '***But I hold it an honor to be disaffected towards a government which in its totality has done more harm to India than any previous system***'. '*In my opinion, non-cooperation with evil is as much a duty as is co-operation with good.*'

Gandhi did not think 'Swaraj' in itself as an end. In his 'Hind Swaraj' [1909], written during his return from England, after series of discussions with both the British liberal intellectuals on South African question, and with the freedom fighters of India operating from London with militant means, he had expressed a different idea of 'Swaraj'. For him 'Swaraj' is a mental state, not physical or political liberation from England. If, for the sake of independence the Indians want to continue the materialistic aims of the Western Civilization, modes of production and production relations, he found no reason for political independence at the first instance, since this could however be achieved even under the British regime. In his idea, the Indians had to overcome the slavery and imitation of the West within. On 2 March, 1930, as a preparatory step to Salt Satyagraha, Gandhi sent a long letter to the Viceroy:

'Dear friend,

Before embarking upon Civil Disobedience and taking the risk I have dreaded to take all these years, ... Whilst, therefore, I hold the British rule to be a curse, I do not intend harm to a single Englishman or to any legitimate interest he may have in India. ... And why do I regard the British rule as a curse? It has impoverished the dumb millions by a system of progressive exploitation and by a ruinous expensive military and civil administration which the country can never afford.

It has reduced us politically to serfdom. It has sapped the foundations of our culture. And by the policy of cruel disarmament, it has degraded us spiritually. ...

The iniquities sampled above are maintained in order to carry on a foreign administration, demonstrably the most expensive in the world. Take your own salary. It is over 21,000 rupees [about £1,750] per month, besides many other indirect additions... You are getting over 700 rupees a day against India's average income of less than two annas (two pence) per day. Thus you are getting much over five thousand times India's average income. The British Prime Minister is getting only ninety times Britain's average income. ...

Nothing but organized non-violence can check the organized violence of the British government.

My ambition is no less than to convert the British people through non-violence.....

... But if you cannot see your way to deal with these evils and if my letter makes no appeal to your heart, on the eleventh day of this month I shall proceed with such co-workers of the Ashram as I can take, to disregard the provisions of the salt laws...

This letter is not in any way intended as a threat but is a simple and sacred duty peremptory on a civil resister. ...

I remain,

Your sincere friend

M.K. Gandhi

As 11 March neared, Indians slowly turned to be fervent, sizzling with enthusiasm about the course of events to take place. Scores of foreign and domestic correspondents were swarming the Sabarmati Ashram. Thousands surrounded the village and waited. On 12 March, after regular prayers at Ashram, Gandhi and seventy eight satyagrahis of the Ashram left Sabarmati to Dandi, south of Ahmedabad – famously called *the Salt Satyagraha*. Through the winding roads from village, the entourage marched for two hundred and forty two miles in twenty four days. In the area he travelled, over three hundred village headmen gave up their government posts. When Gandhi reached the sea of Dandi on 5 April, the caravan had grown into an army of several thousands. The next morning he picked up some salt left by the waves. Gandhi had broken the British law which made it punishable crime to possess salt not obtained from the British government monopoly. His act of walking all through two hundred miles, with several colleague satyagrahis, in public view, and converting the spectacle into convergence of several thousand of Indians in a mela was intended to be an open and published defiance of the mighty Government.

What was the effect of this act of defiance? 'Every villager on Indian's long sea coast went to the beach or waded into the sea with a pan to make salt! It provoked the State with terrible law and order problems. Pandit Malaviya and other moderate co-operators resigned from the Legislative Assembly. The police began invoking violence. But civil resisters did not resist the use of force by the authorities. People were beaten and bitten in the fingers by constables. The state had shown its cruelty, and incapacity. Congress volunteers openly sold contraband salt in cities. Hundreds were handcuffed or their arms fastened with ropes and led off to jail. The agitation spread far and wide to all corners of the country. Teachers, professors and students made salt at the sea and inland, and were sent to jail in batches. A series of arrests, prosecutions and sentencing to jails went on! About sixty thousand political offenders adorned the prisons by their presence.

“Gandhi did two things in 1930; he made the British people aware that they were cruelly subjugating India, and he gave Indians the conviction that they could, by lifting their heads and straightening their spines, lift the yoke from their shoulders. After that, it was inevitable that Britain should someday refuse to rule India and that India should someday refuse to be ruled.”²² He said he would do his part outside the official world. According to Gandhi, ‘*That government is the best which governs the least.*’²³ After Salt Satyagraha and the Second Round Table conference in 1930-31, and his internment from 3 January, 1932 in Yeravda Jail to 8 May 1933, the Poona-Pact, and for another short incarceration from 1 Aug to 23 August, Gandhi was mostly away from freedom struggle concentrating on his ‘constructive program’ which encompassed spinning, challenging untouchability, inter-religious dialogue etc. Shortly after midnight of 8 August, 1942, Gandhi gave ‘Quit India’ call. “....*Every one of you should, from the very moment, consider himself a free man or woman and even act as if you are free and no longer under the heel of this imperialism...*”

‘In comparison to other groups during anti-British anti-colonial struggles, Gandhi organized the Hindus as Indians, not as Hindus, and granted Hinduism the right to maintain its character as an unorganized, *anarchic*, open-ended faith.’²⁴ He was not just agitating for freedom of his people. ‘Gandhi was a living antithesis set up against the thesis of the English.’²⁵ Most of the counter-players of Gandhi believed in some kind of theories based on masculinity, valor, physical force and the supremacy of the arms. Gandhi also thought in those terms in his childhood. Later Gandhi found the folly of it, and ‘used two orderings’, the first one – ‘saintliness’ and the second one – ‘femininity’. He employed these terms in a kind of qualitative differentiation in degree – ‘femininity’ as superior to masculinity, which in turn is better than cowardice.²⁶ Here Gandhi had employed the idea of ‘masculinity’ and ‘violence’ as synonymous with the ‘authority’, and contemplated his fight against both cowardice and authority. D.R. Nagaraj²⁷ says: ‘According to Gandhi, fear is the source of violence. Strictly speaking, his philosophy of nonviolence is nothing but a spiritual analysis of the phenomenon of fear.’ “.....Gandhi’s achievement of awakening Indian people and lending them through an almost bloodless national revolution against foreign rule... was influenced by several of the great libertarian thinkers. His nonviolent technique was developed largely under the influence of Thoreau as well as of Tolstoy, and he was encouraged in his idea of a country of village communes by an assiduous reading of Kropotkin.”²⁸

In fact, his later experiments on ‘brahmacharya’ at the last phases of his life were constantly directed against this male-female dichotomy and transcending to the higher synthesis of androgyny. Thus he located the ‘State’ or ‘Authority’ not just in the political form, but in various points such as the religious heads, teachers, conservatives, the so-called revolutionaries and the very ‘kshatriya-hood’ or ‘masculinity’. It is in this context, Manubehn’s expression – ‘**Bapu – My Mother**’ needs a further examination in understanding Gandhi. In fact many

²² Fischer, p-345

²³ Young India, 2 January 1937

²⁴ AshisNandy, op.cit., p.26

²⁵ Roll May, *Power and Innocence: A search for the sources of violence*, New York: Delta, 1972, p-112 as quoted in Ashis Nandy’s op.cit p-49

²⁶ Ashis Nandy, op.cit., p.53

²⁷ D.R. Nagaraj: *Listening to the Loom - Essays on Literature, Politics and Violence*, Ed by Prithvi Datta and Chandra Shobhi, Permanent Black, (c) 2012 Girija Nagaraj and Amulya Nagaraj, p-272

²⁸ Woodcock, p-234

women found equality and more freedom in the company of Gandhi, and many more writings of women acquainted with him provide for these reflections.

Even his concept of *sanatinism* is contrary to the accepted normative descriptions of it by the orthodox Hindu or the established monasteries of Hindu order. He ‘moved on the periphery of English society during his three years stay in London, absorbing ideas from a wide range of sources, discovering the wisdom of the East through the eyes of the West. He associated with socialists, anarchists, radical Christians and feminists.’²⁹ Gandhi also drew upon Henry Summer Maine’s *Village Communities of the East and West* (1881). As an alternate to centralist systems such as capitalism and communism in which labour was placed as degraded and alienated from the factors of production, these anarchists proposed a decentralized social and economic system. The idea of organic communities, self-governing and self-sufficient in the necessities of life, free to co-operate and associate with one another on the basis of mutuality had impressed Gandhi’s intellect since then. We may also appreciate that the type of community living experimented by him in name of various ashrams, away from the State, and living within community, on certain self-defined terms has also been a peculiar feature of certain anarchist groups. Even Gandhi was said to have visited and be influenced by the Trappist monastery in Durban 1895 in this regard apart from his readings into Ruskin’s *Unto This Last* in 1904. After his Phoenix Settlement (1904-1910), he later established Tolstoy Farm (1910-1913), Sabarmati or Satyagraha Ashram (1915-1933) and Sevagram (1934-1948). In fact his community experiments in the form of ashrams combined the features of both the East and the West monastic living, while simultaneously converting them into laboratories for his ideas of religion, education, manual labour, self-sustenance and ultimately ‘satyagraha’.

William Godwin³⁰ said: Man “must consult his own reason, draw his own conclusions and conscientiously conform himself to his ideas of propriety.” The ‘*inner voice*’ of Gandhi resembles this proposition which had constantly driven Gandhi to differ with the established interpretation of conventional ideas, religious texts, political and legal theories generally accepted by the society as most advanced and as containing higher rationality.

Gandhi was deeply influenced by several philosophers, activists and social theoreticians of both from the West and the East including Thoreau’s idea of civil disobedience. But none could permanently stay as ‘*guru*’ in his mind. ‘If the Mahatma concludes all this with the remark that “the throne” of guru had “remained vacant” in his life even up to *Moksha* time,’ Erikson³¹ writes, ‘one could be tempted to follow the throne imagery in his life, from the time way back in Porbandar when little Moniya had sat himself in the place of Thakorji’s picture to all the real or symbolic thrones and top jobs he would come close to in one context or another. It would appear that he never occupied one and yet never bowed to one either. Any throne, or for that matter any prime ministership, was too sedentary a place for a pilgrimage.’ His actions during his stupendous work in Naukhali dousing the flames of bigotry generated by the partition, and his observance of fast and silence on the day India achieved formal independence makes a compelling reading of an anti-authoritarian and libertarian Gandhi.

²⁹ Mark Thomson, *Gandhi and His Ashrams* (1993), Popular Prakashan, Mumbai, p.18

³⁰ William Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its Influence on Morals and Happiness*, (Third Edition), F.E.L. Priestly, Ed, The University of Toronto Press, 1946, Vol. I, p-168 as quoted in Runkles, *op.cit.*, p.4

³¹ Erikson, p.163

Coming back to our starting point – it's true that Gandhi was a law-abiding citizen, but when his 'inner voice contradicts the proposition, he challenges the authority in various forms – from teasing to open challenge. He contemplates an area of such challenge, and then he chooses his method of challenge within his major frame work of Truth and nonviolence. He allows sufficient time and scope for his counter-player to withdraw or change it. Then he openly announces his intention of violating the authority. He gives even sufficient propaganda for his actions. Then on a fixed time, date and place, he consciously attempts to violate it. If the other side attempts to use force, he refuses to surrender to it. When the counter-player invokes the legal remedies he surrenders to the process voluntarily. He accepts the charge and demands for maximum sentence. He does not demand evidence in the sense of an accused in the modern revolutionary practices. He doesn't avoid trial or delay it on technicalities. At the first instance itself he accepts his dereliction, and asks for maximum penalty. Thus he compels an equally moral and ethical counter-narrative in the conscience of the prosecutor or the State.

Anhony J. Parel may be more correct in saying that Gandhi was not an anarchist and that his philosophy tends towards harmonious construction of tradition and modernity. If we examine various concepts of anarchism, and more specifically the revolutionary politics of it which are overwhelmingly violent, and highly individual, they may not be properly fitting into the Gandhian scheme of things. Yet if we carefully examine his actions - not accepting any specific authority as the final arbiter, constantly questioning the absolute authority within and without, series of acts violating 'the Law' or 'the Authority' consciously and his volunteering the penalty imposed by the authority without resistance, the communities he established on the lines of many anarchist communities, his fascination to jails, and his idea of the State etc., they border certain terrains of anarchism. It is an open ended debate and deserves further research.