

Gandhi's Failure: Anticolonial Movements and Postcolonial Futures

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M.K. Gandhi was the undisputed leader of India's struggle for independence. Yet his vision for postcolonial India was completely marginalized at the moment of decolonization. The article takes this seemingly paradoxical juncture as the vantage point from which to offer a critique of Gandhi's political thought and more broadly an analysis of the shift from anticolonial movements to postcolonial rule. Through the voices of Gandhi's two most significant contemporary critics—B.R. Ambedkar and Jawaharlal Nehru—the article shows how his ideas failed to either inspire the struggle of the ruled (Ambedkar), or address the anxieties of the would-be rulers (Nehru). Gandhi's vision for a postcolonial India persisted within the conceptual constellation of negating colonial modernity, rather than the historical possibilities of postcolonial futures. These predicaments provide an opportunity to analyze the persistence of modern western political imaginaries in the decolonized world. Not through mere assertions of continuity or mimicry, but rather through the concrete struggles, aspirations, and anxieties that constituted the strands of those transitional moments.

The image is both poignant and dramatic. On August 15, 1947, as India finally gained its independence from colonial rule, M.K. Gandhi—the most important leader for the movement that won that independence and who was duly christened the “father” of the nascent nation—was far away from the triumphant celebrations in the capital Delhi. In the city of Calcutta, ravaged by religious riots sparked by the partition of the country, he spent the day in an abandoned house in a Muslim majority part of the city, fasting. This distance was not merely symbolic. Any discussion of Gandhi with respect to the making of postcolonial India is suffused with an air of abandonment and tragedy. His was the story of a path not taken, of a “Father of the Nation” whose filial creation chose not to make itself in his image. The massive apparatus of the postcolonial developmental state ran contrary to his lifelong and consistent critique of the modern state and

centralized political power. The moment of his triumph—the birth of a new nation through the struggle of which he was the unquestioned leader—was also a moment of his most decisive defeat. Success, in Gandhi's case, was indelibly marked with failure.

This rather remarkable conjunction of success (as a leader of anti-colonial movement) and failure (in influencing the institutional design of the following postcolonial regime) poses an interesting paradox. I take this paradox as the lens through which to critically examine Gandhi's ideas and, more broadly, the predicaments of the transition from an anticolonial to a postcolonial political moment. In recent years, there has been renewed scholarly interest in Gandhi as a political thinker and practitioner.¹ What many of these works seek to recover is the robust critique of modern political and social forms and a distinct alternative to them that he advanced—for both its critical and constructive potentials. Precisely because the primary referent point for much of this scholarship has been (justifiably) Gandhi's prominence as an anti-colonial leader and thinker, my focus on the paradox of postcolonial failure provides a complementary critical rejoinder. By looking back at Gandhi's thought from the historical standpoint of his paradoxical marginalization, I would argue for a deflationary reading of Gandhi's ideas—as a thinker of the *non-colonial* rather than the *post-colonial*. This suggests that while Gandhi remains an original and productive critic of colonial condition, one cannot unproblematically reconstruct an alternative vision to Western modernity or search for the constitutive

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principles for postcolonial futures from his repertoire of ideas.

My goal is not to marshal evidence of an irrefutable “judgment of history” against Gandhi’s ideas, putting the burden of his success or his failure on his ideas alone. I analyze the formation, contestation, and marginalization of Gandhi’s ideas as situated within their particular historical conjecture. In the prevalent political or scholarly conversation, Gandhi is viewed as the proponent of non-violent actions or as a theorist for a politics inflected with morality. Yet he was not a detached theorist of politics or of alternatives to Western modernity. His ideas were generated in the process of leading a mass movement against colonial rule and were shaped by the socio-political constellation of that particular endeavor. Tied as they were to concrete political struggles, his thought needs to be historicized within the landscape that those struggles generated. The conjecture of the paradox provides us with a significant—though by no means exclusive—historical standpoint from which to analyze his ideas as inflected by such struggles and contestations. The critique of his ideas, therefore, is not presented here from an Archimedian standpoint but through the two most significant contemporary voices that argued forcefully for the marginalization of his ideas for a postcolonial future—B.R. Ambedkar and Jawaharlal Nehru.

The eve of the postcolonial transition asked of the Indian political actors two questions: what and how. What should be the principles on which a new postcolonial Indian polity is to be established? And how to bring about the transition from a colonial to a postcolonial condition to realize that vision? The first part of this paper investigates how Gandhi sought to answer those questions. To provide a brief roadmap, let us consider each of the what and the how questions in turn. Gandhi’s critique of colonialism was not limited to its specific wrongs, but encompassed the modern logic of politics itself, whereby political institutions constituted a plane where the diverse interests and conflicts of social life can be mediated and overcome. He felt that political institutions actually impeded the development of moral and affective resources whereby the calculus of interests can be overcome at the level of embedded social life itself. This was his answer to the *what* question. The answer to the *how* question—one that Gandhi called his “constructive programme”—shared the same basic principles. Gandhi wrote and spoke extensively about social problems like untouchability or poverty, and the consequent need for social reform. However, legal or institutional mechanisms led by the state were not the way to achieve those reforms. The process had to be one that worked on the moral-psychological disposition of individuals and their internalization of the principles, through which they

would voluntarily come forward to lessen the worst consequences of these embedded power relations. The reformist commands of state institutions on the other hand were coercive, prone to create a cycle of violence and resentment, and hence to be avoided.

As independence became imminent, the question of how to order a new society and the contrasting role of the “constructive programme” versus the modern state assumed centrality. The process of constitution-making provided the setting for that debate to play out. At the Constituent Assembly, Gandhi’s vision of a polity constituted around decentralized village republics and constructive programme was comprehensively rejected. The second part of the paper reconstructs the main critiques of Gandhi’s ideas and offers a stylized version of the debate through Ambedkar and Nehru, the two most significant contemporary opponents of Gandhi’s vision as well as the architects of the Constitution.

Ambedkar was one of Gandhi’s most important antagonists amongst his compatriots (second perhaps only to Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan).² He sought to speak for those exploited by the Indian caste hierarchy, and felt that Gandhi and the Congress perpetuated the continuing dominance of the upper castes in society. Nehru, on the other hand was the chosen successor of Gandhi’s to the position of the primary leader of the Congress (subsequently India’s first Prime Minister), and he represented the postcolonial ruling elite. The justification for restaging the contemporary critique of Gandhi’s vision through Ambedkar and Nehru goes beyond their position as the two most prominent figures of the constitution making process. More significant are the contrasting locations from which they offered their critique. For the sake of clarity, we could call Ambedkar’s critique as the one of the outsider, made from the margins of both social and political spheres of power. Nehru’s, on the other hand, was the critique of an insider—made by the foremost member of the political elite, and representing the anxieties of the soon-to-be governors of the postcolonial regime. Taken together, they provide us with the most influential versions of the challenges to Gandhi’s ideas from the standpoint of both the rulers and the ruled.

Beyond a critique of Gandhi in particular, this debate speaks to the differing conceptions of independence that were central to the political discourse around postcolonial transitions of the mid-twentieth century. Gandhi imagined independence as a rejection of a Western model of politics, and hence through a binary framework of colonial versus non-colonial. The failure to do so could be seen as a continuation of colonialism beyond colonial rule—an argument that persists in a variant form today through influential critiques of so-called Third World states as continued colonization of the postcolonial world

by Western conceptual apparatus.³ Much of the contemporary scholarly work on decolonization or post-colonial studies focus their attention on the discursive aspect of colonialism and its persistence. Ambedkar and Nehru, from contrasting positions, viewed independence as a moment of reconfiguration rather than rejection. They sought to reclaim the colonial inheritance of the state in aid of projects (Nehru) and struggles (Ambedkar) that went beyond the demise of colonial subjugation, and hence rejected the desired identity between postcolonial and non-colonial/non-Western. Such hopes of reclamation—flawed as they might have been—informed much of the political actors in the newly-decolonized countries of the twentieth century. The postcolonial state, in this version, rather than being a simple facsimile of colonial ideology, was rather the site of the aspiration, contestations, and anxieties of post-colonial subjects. The paradox that we take as our standpoint was one of the more meaningful conjectures where these two versions of the postcolonial state—which still serve as reference points for major debates on and within postcolonial polities—engaged with each other not just on the plain of ideas but on the terrain of concrete historical projects.

Against Colonial Modernity

Inverting the Discourse

Gandhi's prominence and originality as an anticolonial politician and thinker can be attributed to the depth of his critique of the colonial enterprise. In its simplest form, in the colonial narrative the colonized were assigned a place of historical backwardness, thereby denying them the requisite attributes and potential for governing themselves. The markers for this backwardness could be found in all the various aspects of the colonized society: from its underdeveloped economic organizations, to its "irrational" cultural practices. Given the supposed lack of inherent political potential of the Indian society, the state by necessity had to be something external. It had to stand above and at a distance, providing an orderly rule for a society that could not rule itself.

The predicament of the nationalist movement before Gandhi was that its possibilities of resistance were framed by the discourse produced by colonial power. The prevalent attempt was to bridge the gap between the indigenous society and its colonial masters, which would then allow the former to claim the same political freedom that was granted within the metropole. The nationalists would argue about the causes and nature of the Indian backwardness, as well as the time and the process of recovery, but the fundamental logic of spatial ordering of history by which India had to traverse the path to maturity remained unchallenged. Rather than attempting to enter the debate on those terms,

Gandhi's move was to challenge the very logic of this narrative.

Gandhi sought to invert the discursive dynamic of the relationship between state and society under colonialism, whereby the latter ceded absolute primacy and agency to the former. Gandhi countered this by conceptualizing the Indian society as a potentially autonomous entity that through the associative and moral resources inherent to it could generate its own principles of self-organization, thereby overcoming the need for an external authority.⁴ It was not some perceived deficiency of Indian society that legitimized colonial rule, but rather it was the imposition and intervention of the colonial state and its associated modern institutions that was the main source of that society's ills. What was required was not to traverse the path towards a more "developed" society, but a process of moral development that could bring forth self-rule.⁵

The Modern State and the Logic of Politics

Central to this vision was Gandhi's well-known critique of the modern state and associated logic of politics—which is seen as a solution to the problem of an inherent potential for disunity and strife in modern societies. For modern theorists of state, the solution to the problem of dissension inherent to the modern social sphere is sought in the sphere of politics. The state is seen as *necessary* as it creates institutions and generates norms that can transcend the divisions produced by the material reality of social life. It is also *desirable* as it creates a sphere where a re-orientation towards unity and universality can be generated, thereby overcoming the particularities of one's social life. It is this move, turning towards political institutions to generate a condition for unified collective existence, that Gandhi opposed.

The demand of the state for adherence to the norms it has generated in the form of laws is absolute, secured in the last instance through the coercive threat of punishments. The will of the state is formulated on the basis of certain larger "ends" or *telos*—e.g., territorial integrity, development, or security.⁶ The state subsumes the complex multiplicity of everyday social life and coercively coordinates it in ways that are amenable to this larger end. This determined march towards a desirable end—the public good—inscribes violence at the heart of modern political forms. I use the phrase modern political forms since Gandhi's critique was directed not just at the state but other kinds of modern political institutions—such as the political party or revolutionary organizations. Hence Gandhi's call to disband the Congress as a party after independence was won,⁷ or his opposition to the Bolshevik Revolution.⁸

Gandhi—as has been oft-noted—sought to foreground means over ends. His name for this form of non-violent and means-oriented collective action was *satyagraha*.

Ajay Skaria has offered an influential reading of the practice that was at the heart of *satyagraha*, which he calls “neighborliness.”⁹ Neighborliness was not a fixed set of normative imperatives, but rather an ever-ongoing praxis of being vis-à-vis another. It was based on acts of self-discipline¹⁰ and sacrifice that can remake both one’s own self as well as one’s adversary based on love rather than commands.¹¹

There were significant political stakes in such a reorientation. Gandhi’s principal contribution to Indian politics was to lead a popular movement against colonial rule by forging a contingent alliance between the disparate groups opposed to the colonial regime, most notably by mobilizing the rural peasant masses (the vast majority of the population) under the banner of Indian National Congress and its predominantly urban elite leadership.¹² As Karuna Mantena has argued, contrary to its apparent idealism, Gandhian politics of non-violence could be understood as a realist reaction to the inherent potential for conflict in politics, which was exacerbated in moments of mobilization at such a massive level.¹³ Gandhi’s political thought was marked by a “contextual, consequentialist, and moral-psychological analysis of a political world understood to be marked by inherent tendencies toward conflict.”¹⁴ Approaching politics from the certitude of desirable ends necessarily led to violence and coercion. It had the possible effect of creating resentment amongst one’s opponents and further entrenching divisions and self-interests, thereby ultimately proving to be self-defeating.¹⁵ Even the act of persuasion by the force of reason was not sufficient to overcome these issues. Not just an “appeal to intelligence,” but “piercing the heart” was the object of *satyagraha*.¹⁶ To create a collectivity one had to do no less than convert one’s opponents.

Gandhi imagined a community where recognition and respect would be embodied and authentic, not mediated through the state and the law. In such a community, a practice of self-governance through reflexive self-regulation would be possible. Hence, there would be no place for the police, lawyers, or the parliament¹⁷—no representative bodies,¹⁸ no modern state institutions as we know them.¹⁹ While Gandhi himself referred to this political vision as one of “enlightened anarchy,”²⁰ it would be a stretch to call him an anarchist *sensu stricto*. Gandhi did not seek to provide comprehensive justifications as to why the authority of the state should not be obeyed. Rather, within the concrete political context of India, he sought to counter the claim that the modern centralized state is either inevitable or desirable as an institution that can guarantee a just social order. More narrowly, he sought to counter the idea that a modern centralized state had to be the primary instrument through which the necessary and desirable change in the Indian social order can be effected. Hence, while at times he was willing to countenance both the existence and the limited usefulness of modern state institutions,²¹ he was very clear that it was

unlikely that meaningful social change and the construction of a desirable social order could be achieved through those institutions.²²

The Alternative

The shift from institutions of the state to the interactions of social life changed the scale of politics. For Gandhi, modern politics sought to solve the tensions in society through distance, from which it could subsume the multiplicity of interests in society in the name of unity or public good. *Satyagraha* on the other hand demanded the intimacy of proximity. There are two significant ways in which Gandhi imagined a more proximate scale for politics—the relational proximity of kinship and the spatial proximity of the village. This rescaling was the focus of the eventual rift between Gandhi and the post-colonial nation-builders, and hence each of those themes require some elaboration.

Kinship

Kinship and the family provided the necessary models of affection and cooperation that were required to reconfigure relations of conflict. Amongst “members of a family,” Gandhi wrote, “there is no feeling of mine or thine. That is why they are called co-operators. Similarly when we take a society, a nation or the entire mankind as a family all men become co-operators.”²³ *Satyagraha* therefore had to be “the extension of domestic law on the political field.”²⁴ The allusion to affective bonds of the family was a recurrent theme in Gandhi’s writings and speeches. These were placed in contraposition to the institutions of the colonial state. In *Hind Swaraj* he takes the example of a “quarrel” being litigated at the court.²⁵ An “ordinary man” would have tried to settle their quarrel through conversation, like a good neighbor would. The lawyer on the other hand is a “stranger” to his client, who is further estranged by the abstract language of law. The quarrel, disfigured by the language of a legal dispute can now only be settled with the might of the state backing one or the other parties. Hence law “makes brothers enemies.”²⁶ Law takes simple “quarrels”—a disagreement between two individuals familiar to each other—and subjects them to a verdict based on an abstract set of rules. The distance of the judge from the particular life of the dispute robs any possibility of overcoming through mutual understanding and affection. The rule of the stranger who promises justice by virtue of being distant from society was the essence of India’s subjugation.²⁷

Instead of the estrangement of legal rules, the ideal form of reconciliatory justice should be modeled on the affectionate wisdom of the father. Discussing his notion of *Ramrajya*, an idealized polity based on the widely popular mythology of king *Rama*, Gandhi states that the relationship between the ruler and the ruled should be “as good as that between a father and a son.”²⁸ Such form of

wisdom could be found in the council of elders known as the *panch*—from which comes the notion of the *panchayat*, the central institution of the village republics he went on to propose. Resolving disputes through traditional arbitration by the *panch* “presumes a distinctive horizon of reconciliation and resolution; one where unity is produced by deference to the wisdom and knowledge of the father.”²⁹

Kinship models also supplied one of the most significant proposals in Gandhi’s program for social change—trusteeship. Late colonial India was marked by increasing peasant mobilization against the exploitation of the semi-feudal landholding system known as *zamindari*. Faced with the growing specter of conflict between landlords and peasants, and between the rich and the poor in general, Gandhi—influenced by John Ruskin—proposed and propagated the concept of trusteeship.³⁰ He suggested that the rich were “mere trustees” of the wealth that they owned, and had a moral obligation to voluntarily distribute the excess to the poor and the needy.³¹

The moral obligation to act as a trustee was generated through bonds of kinship. Landlords and peasants “should be members of a joint family in which the *Zamindar* is the head guarding their [the peasant’s] rights.”³² Landlords “must regard themselves, . . . as trustees holding their wealth for the good of their wards, the ryots [the peasants].”³³ Trusteeship, if practiced properly could solve the antagonistic relationship over land holdings. “If [the landlord] has been discharging his function as a trustee honestly [the peasants] would come to him before long in contrition and seek his guidance and help.”³⁴ He held the same to be true regarding industrial capitalists and factory workers, and sought to organize labor unions on the basis of trusteeship.³⁵

Trusteeship was Gandhi’s contribution to the fierce debate about property redistribution and land reform that was taking place as independence drew near. A more equitable property regime had to come about through moral and voluntary action on the part of the property owners—charity and renunciation, not land reform. “I do not want to dispossess anybody,” Gandhi emphasized. “I should then be departing from the rule of *Ahimsa* [nonviolence].”³⁶ While on a few occasions Gandhi admitted being open to limited use of state power for property acquisition,³⁷ there is little doubt—from both his words³⁸ and his actions³⁹—that he felt such a scenario would be far from desirable. To Nehru’s explicit doubts regarding the effectiveness of trusteeship to achieve equitable property relations, Gandhi replied that “we do not seek to coerce any; we seek to convert them. This method may appear to be long, perhaps too long, but I am convinced that it is the shortest.”⁴⁰

The Village Community

If kinship provided the relational basis, the spatial site of the “constructive programme” had to be the village. The

“real plague spots” in colonial India were urban centers like Calcutta and Bombay, corrupted by modern economic relations and the individuation that it engendered.⁴¹ Instead, the true soul of India was to be found in its villages—their lack of development a mark of resistance to the corrupting effects of modern civilization. The village, in its ideal Gandhian form, was to be self-sufficient economically, producing almost all of what it needs and thereby giving it autonomy from the outside world.⁴² The political decentralization and economic self-sufficiency would provide the necessary conditions for the development of individual self-governance.⁴³

Gandhi’s social imaginary of the village was formulated as a negative (and a negation) of colonial modernity. The village came to stand for an idealized social setting that could provide a reverse image of the individuated modern social life. This idealization of the Indian village did not originate from Gandhi. He derived it from circuits of ideas widely prevalent from the nineteenth century onwards. The most prominent influence was Henry Maine’s classic *Village Communities in the East and West*, which Gandhi radicalized towards anti-colonial ends.⁴⁴ In making the village a symbolic spatial site of anti-modernity, this construction was part of a global anti-statist, anti-capitalist discourse. The notion of the “community” was often invoked as a resistive resource against the emergence of modern political and economic forms. In the colonies, as the formal domains of political and institutional powers were surrendered to the colonial masters, community and village came to signify the uncorrupted inner domain of the germinal nation that could be mobilized as a counter-narrative against that domination.⁴⁵ Gandhi’s discourse was an exemplary version of this move.

In 1946 Gandhi presented the most detailed version of his vision for postcolonial India in an interview. The basic political unit was to be the village, which was to become a republic: self-sufficient and autonomous.⁴⁶ Each republic would be joined together in “ever-widening, never-ascending, circles.”⁴⁷ In other words, it was to be a loose and non-hierarchical federation of village republics, in sharp contrast to the pyramidal structure of the modern state.⁴⁸ Decentralization would preserve the political autonomy of the villages, while a non-capitalist artisanal production system would preserve its economic autonomy.

The Critiques

A few months after Gandhi gave that interview, the Constitutional Assembly was convened to formulate the architecture of political power in soon-to-be-independent India. The Assembly was for all practical purposes controlled by the Congress, a party that Gandhi had been an undisputed leader of. Nevertheless, the Assembly at no point seriously considered the Gandhian idea of a decentralized federation of village republic as a model

for constitutional design.⁴⁹ Gandhi himself was resigned to this possibility by 1946,⁵⁰ though his followers continued to make his case within and outside the Assembly, with not much success. We will now turn our attention to the most significant and influential of the voices who engaged directly with Gandhi's vision, and articulated their opposition to it from contrasting standpoints: B.R. Ambedkar and Jawaharlal Nehru.

Ambedkar: Critique of the Ruled

Gandhi symbolically exemplified the possibility of overcoming social conflicts through conscientious actions in his own personal life. Through his model of self-sufficient, ascetic living, he aimed to produce most of the bare necessities he required to survive thereby overcoming the exploitation integral to the process of production by withdrawing from consumption, at the same time providing poverty with the symbolic veneer of moral virtue. His *ashram*, formed as a simulation of village communities, was similarly free from the stratification and social antagonisms existing in actual villages.⁵¹ However, most landlords or upper caste Hindus were not Gandhi, and hardly any village in India resembled his *ashram*. Even Gandhi admitted, as late as 1941, that the constructive program was far from a success and that he had "nothing much yet to show by way of demonstration [of its results]."⁵²

The problem, however, was not simply one of all men not being angels, as Madison would have put it. For B.R. Ambedkar, the problem with Gandhi's ideas went far beyond a case of naive optimism. Ambedkar was one of Gandhi's most significant contemporary antagonists. Unlike Gandhi who was born into a dominant trading caste, Ambedkar was born a dalit, considered "untouchable" by the dominant castes. He experienced first-hand while growing up the degradation and discrimination of the caste system. After academic training in the United States and England and establishing a legal career in Bombay, Ambedkar's project was to organize the dalits into an independent political group, challenging the hegemony of the dominant-caste-led Congress. This brought him in direct conflict with Gandhi, who was keen to insist on his and Congress's role as the representative of *all* Indians, irrespective of caste. Both his distinct social position (as a dalit) and political project (organizing dalits as an independent political force) motivated Ambedkar's critique of Gandhi.

From this standpoint, the reality of oppression at the hands of social superiors was in no way less of a problem than the repression at the hands of the state. Ambedkar, in definite contrast to Gandhi, held that

Most people do not realize that society can practice tyranny and oppression against an individual in a far greater degree than a Government can. The means and scope that are open to society for oppression are more extensive than those that are

open to Government, also they are far more effective. What punishment in the penal code is comparable in its magnitude and its severity to excommunication?⁵³

The village, which Gandhi had sought to posit as a "direct counterpoint"⁵⁴ to the modern state was the site where the tyranny of social power was at its most rampant. The village in reality was nothing but a "sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and communalism,"⁵⁵ riven with a hierarchical social organization that was the source of "social and moral evils."⁵⁶ For Ambedkar, Gandhi's suggestion of basing the polity of an independent India around such a hierarchical structure was not just naive. Rather, the governing part of "self-governing village republics" was dependent upon the oppressive order such a hierarchical organization produced. Gandhi's indifference was not a mere "accident." He required the "class structure" of the village communities to function as a "living faith."⁵⁷ Hence, his apparently tacit acceptance of them was in actuality his "official doctrine."⁵⁸ Despite Gandhi's denial to the effect, having disavowed the necessity of state institutions and legal norms, he fell back upon the traditional structures inherent to Indian society to construct some kind of collective order, with some modification at the level of customary conducts. However, as Ambedkar stressed in a response to Gandhi, "My quarrel with Hindus and Hinduism is not over the imperfections of their social conduct. It is much more fundamental. It is over their ideals."⁵⁹ The "depressed classes," according to Ambedkar, therefore had no good reason to accept those ideals or ordering principles over modern institutions.

Gandhi had only two meaningful experiences of personally organizing a *satyagraha* in villages—in Champaran and Kheda in 1918—which he held up as ideal models to be followed.⁶⁰ Historians have surmised that the particularities of those formative cases, where the major issue was not hostility between classes but common grievances against the colonial state, informed his view about the possibility for non-conflictual resolutions of social antagonisms.⁶¹ Crucially for Ambedkar's critique, such experiences shaped Gandhi's idea of a cross-caste and class harmonious solidarity within the context of the rural social order. Furthermore, it posited an antagonistic binary between the oppression of the colonial state, and resistive resources of the community. "The people of Bardoli could not secure justice as long as they were afraid of being punished by the Government . . . They freed themselves from its fear by surrendering their hearts to their Sardar."⁶² It is precisely such a replacement of the Government with the Sardar (village notable) that Ambedkar was against, since he felt that it required the lower castes to acquiesce to their inferior status and material condition within such an arrangement.

Read this way, Ambedkar's critique was not merely concerned with the Gandhian model of social change on the grounds of it being idealistic or ineffective. It was

directed at the Gandhian idea of coalition building itself, since at the heart of that coalition lay a dependence on traditional social hierarchies as a mechanism to generate loyalty and acquiescence. The solution was to organize the lower castes independently of Congress. Institutionally, it meant demanding a system of separate electorates, whereby the lower castes would vote separately to choose their own political representatives.⁶³ The distinction in political representation would reflect the disparity of social interests, and the resulting political empowerment would lead to the social emancipation of the depressed classes. Against this demand, Gandhi went on a hunger strike—the only time he took such an action against an Indian leader. With Gandhi's health failing and pressure mounting on him as a result, Ambedkar was forced to sign the "Poona Pact," giving up the demand for separate electorates.⁶⁴

Despite that setback which extinguished the possibility of a separate electorate, Ambedkar was insistent that the social emancipation of the "depressed classes" could only happen through their political empowerment. How could the depressed classes ever "accept" Gandhi as their "saviour"?⁶⁵ Given the admitted failures of Gandhian "social processes" to help the cause of the least powerful in society, how could one agree with his anathema to "political processes"?⁶⁶ Rather than relying on "charity" and "zeal", Ambedkar argued, the "Untouchables feel that . . . their emancipation . . . can be secured by them *by political power, and nothing else.*"⁶⁷ Through a constitutionalized sphere of legal and democratic equality there was at least the outline of a "common plane where the privileged and subject classes could meet," a formal equality that would be non-existent in the Gandhian world of village republics.⁶⁸ Despite the limits of formal constitutional equality, electoral politics and legal institutions at least provided forums through which these marginalized groups could mobilize and demand alterations to their condition.

Ambedkar went on to become the Chairman of the Drafting Committee for the Constitution. One of his major priorities in this role was countering any influence of Gandhian ideas in the Constitutional design, remarking that "I am glad that the Draft Constitution has discarded the village and adopted the individual as its unit."⁶⁹ There were many who argued for modified versions of Gandhian principles in the Constitution: e.g., devolution of some powers to village *panchayats*.⁷⁰ Ambedkar opposed this on the grounds that the more localized the center of political power, the higher was the danger of it being corrupted and captured by local power relations. In opposition to Gandhi's politics of proximity, the centralization would offer the necessary distance from locally entrenched hierarchies.⁷¹ The abstract neutrality of law courts, however imperfect, would be preferable to adjudication by *panchayats* embedded in local networks of social power. Finally, on the insistence of the Gandhians in

the Assembly, certain Gandhian principles were included in the Constitution only in the Directive Principles of State Policy—an ideological portmanteau of desirable political goals without any legal enforceability.⁷² Outside of these provisions, the rest of the Constitution erected an architecture of a robust modern state, with centralized power structures and provisions facilitating decisive social interventions. Influenced by Ambedkar (and his reading of post-civil war reconstruction in America),⁷³ it further included rights that could be enforced horizontally—that is, against fellow citizens rather than the State.⁷⁴ It was a way for individuals to call upon state power to remedy the worst forms of domination caused by social power, in stark contrast of Gandhi's worldview.

While Ambedkar offered the most detailed and influential version of the critique of Gandhi mentioned here, he was by no means the only one who advanced it. The communists, who were increasingly influential amongst the labor unions in the cities, and Sahajanand Saraswati, who through the *Kisan Sabha* had mobilized vast numbers of peasants in North India,⁷⁵ expressed their opposition on broadly similar lines. What is common amongst these groups was their respective commitment towards mobilizing the different exploited groups in society (be it the dalits, the peasantry, or the workers) as distinct political forces. Hence their resistance to Congress's attempt to claim hegemonic leadership over the entirety of Indian society irrespective of its internal cleavages. From their standpoint, Gandhi's vision for postcolonial India was at best oblivious to existing hierarchies in society, and at worst complicit and dependent on them. His principles of social change were an extension of his principles for political mobilizations—both of which sought to undermine the political autonomy—and hence social emancipation—of the dominated castes and classes.

Nehru: Critique of the Rulers

As Gandhi's chosen successor as the leader of Congress, and hence the presumptive Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru's critique came from a very different place. Nehru was unfailingly loyal and admiring of Gandhi's leadership of the anti-colonial movement, and shared an almost filial bond with him. Yet he consistently disagreed with Gandhi's vision for a postcolonial India. Nehru's critique of Gandhi has primarily been understood through the lens of their ideological difference on the question of modernity and development. As opposed to Gandhi, who sought to fundamentally question the precepts of modern socio-economic systems, Nehru was convinced of their desirability. The problem with India was not the disruption of traditional modes of being through the colonial imposition of modern political and social forms, but rather the fact that colonialism hampered and distorted the developmental trajectory of India's

society and economy.⁷⁶ The need of the hour therefore was industrialization, not rural artisanship. This further meant that in contrast to Gandhi, Nehru was very much an end-oriented politician, and hence prioritized the desired end (modernization and development) over the means (satyagraha). These vast ideological differences between the two undoubtedly explain their deep disagreements as the moment of transition drew nearer. Yet there is another aspect to their debate that is of equal (if not greater) importance, since it reveals not just a personal ideological contrast, but a larger question facing the postcolonial elite at the transitional moment—and which Nehru as the most prominent member of that elite (along with most of the Congress leadership) felt Gandhi's vision was inadequate in addressing.

Not only did Nehru think that modernization and economic development was necessary for India, he thought that they were *urgent* necessities. Not only would Gandhi's vision of social change eventually leave India underdeveloped and lacking in basic amenities of modern life, the postcolonial leadership could ill afford the time required for the slow patient work of "constructive programme". The rationale for this urgency reveals the contrast between Nehru and Ambedkar's position. If Ambedkar was concerned about the (potential) success of Congress's claim to represent the oppressed sections of the society, Nehru was concerned about the (potential) fragility of such a claim. Hence time was of the essence for addressing the undercurrent of social dissensus that could destabilize the nascent political order. To understand this concern, and why a critique of Gandhi arose out of it, we need to briefly return to the anxieties of representation in Gandhi's own politics.

Gandhi was ambivalent about representation as a central tenet of modern politics. He famously described the British Parliament as "a sterile woman and a prostitute,"⁷⁷ and remarked that "if the money and time wasted by Parliament were entrusted to a few good men, the English nation would be occupying today a much higher platform."⁷⁸ Yet as a leader of a nationalist movement Gandhi could not completely avoid the problem of legitimate representation. To successfully confront the colonial rulers, Gandhi and the Congress had to claim that they represented—spoke for—the nation-to-be that was India. The stakes of Congress's claim for being a sole and unified representative were high leading up to the independence, when several groups in Indian society proposed their separate and distinct assertions of representation. The colonial government was only too glad to enable and encourage such a multiplicity of representative claims. Faced with this potential for fracturing, Gandhi was forceful in asserting that the Congress had an exclusive claim on representing Indians.⁷⁹ While attending the Round Table Conference for political reforms in London, sharing the space with "representatives" of various social

groups, he stated that "Congress is only one of the many parties that are said to be represented here. The organic fact, however, is that it is the only representative body speaking for the vast masses in India."⁸⁰

The claim to speak for the whole—and nothing but the whole—was crucial to Congressional control of the nationalist movement. However, the success of that representational claim was contingent upon the solidarity enabled by the common opposition to the colonial regime. When the focus shifted to the postcolonial regime transition and the social and political aspirations that such a possibility generated, the efficacy of that claim was no longer a given. Rather, the slippages between Gandhi's words and the aspirations of even those who claimed to follow him became evident much before the transition to the postcolonial regime was imminent.

Shahid Amin, in his seminal work studying the reception of the Gandhian message by the peasants of Gorakhpur in 1921, found that "the popular notion of 'Gandhiji's Swaraj' appears to have taken shape quite independently of the district leadership of the Congress."⁸¹ Gandhi's visit there, rather than imparting any specific plan of action, triggered the political imagination of the peasantry, making it possible to think of overturning relations of power and domination that had seemed inviolable.⁸² "Though deriving their legitimacy from the supposed orders of Gandhi, peasant actions in such cases were framed in terms of what was *popularly regarded to be just, fair and possible*."⁸³ Amin's findings were not unique to Gorakhpur. Gandhi's message was often creatively appropriated for numerous militant peasant struggles, at times against Indian landlords, and in explicit conflict with his ideals of political action.⁸⁴ Gandhi's anxiety about the creative possibilities of popular imagination was expressed in his reflection on the need for "disciplining" the masses.⁸⁵ "Before we can make real headway," Gandhi wrote, "we must train these masses of men . . . who want to be taught and led. But a few intelligent, sincere, local workers are needed, and the whole nation can be organized to act intelligently, and democracy can be evolved out of mobocracy."⁸⁶

Gandhi's acknowledgement of the need for imposed discipline and training was an expression of his anxiety about the gap between his ideas and those of the masses—and what they regarded as "just, fair, and possible."⁸⁷ As the masses creatively appropriated Gandhian tropes, they could no longer be viewed as passive receptors of nationalist ideology. In their persistent, rebellious expression of their political subjectivity they simultaneously demanded that independence should also include a plan for an end to their exploitation and threatened Congress's ability to plausibly speak for the nation—not immediately, but potentially.

The divergence between Gandhi and Nehru could be framed through the lens of this problem. The most direct

expression of their disagreement can be found in Nehru's reply to a letter from Gandhi in 1945, arguing for the Congress to adopt the latter's vision.⁸⁸ Nehru responded that the crucial issue before the Congress was not the means oriented question of "non-violence versus violence," but rather how to "achieve" a new political and social order.⁸⁹ The village could not be the basis of such an order. "A village, normally speaking, is backward intellectually and culturally Narrow-minded people are much more likely to be untruthful and violent."⁹⁰ The vision that Gandhi had laid out in *Hind Swaraj*, Nehru said bluntly, was "completely unreal."⁹¹ Rather, the proper question in front of Congress was how to achieve certain "objectives" like "sufficiency of food, clothing, housing, education, sanitation etc." and crucially, to find ways "to attain them speedily."⁹² India had to become a "technically advanced country."⁹³

These were well known ideological differences between them. But Nehru then continues to present the high stakes of these differences. Implicitly pointing out that Gandhi's ideas are far from being a consensual common sense regarding a new vision of collective existence, Nehru writes that taking them up at the eve of independence would "create a great confusion in people's minds resulting in inability to act in the present."⁹⁴ More worryingly, it "may also result in creating barriers between Congress and others in the country," jeopardizing its ability to speak for the entire nation.⁹⁵ Hence, Nehru argued, this was no longer just a difference of opinion between him and Gandhi. "Ultimately of course this and other questions will have to be decided by representatives of free India."⁹⁶

Nehru's deployment of the notion of "representation" against Gandhi was deeply significant, and reveals an ambiguity about his assessment of Gandhi's place in the anti-colonial movement. In an otherwise excessively admiring account of Gandhi in his book *Discovery of India*, there lies a crucial passage that is worth quoting at length:

Congress was dominated by Gandhi, yet it was a peculiar domination, for the Congress was an active, rebellious, many-sided organization, full of variety of opinion, and not easily led this way or that. . . . and more than one occasion there came a break between him and Congress. But always he was the symbol of India's independence and unyielding opposition to all those who sought to enslave her, and *it was as such a symbol people gathered to him and accepted his lead, even though they disagreed with him on other matters*. . . . [W]hen the struggle was inevitable that symbol became all important, and everything else was secondary.⁹⁷

Nehru here subtly alludes to the fact that Gandhi's unrivalled leadership position was not necessarily due to a wide consensus on the substantive aspects of his social or political imagination, but the symbolic register of his politics. Gandhi's deployment of the symbolism of community and kinship created a "close correspondence" between his rhetorical repertoire and the traditional "peasant-communitarian" language of resistance.⁹⁸ Gandhi emerged therefore as an all-important "hinge" in

a contingent alliance between the masses and the elites that gave the anti-colonial movement its formidable character.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, as Nehru hinted, it was an alliance "contingent" on the existence of a common enemy to struggle against. In the absence of that contingent condition, as the postcolonial transition drew near, there was no inevitable reason for the Congress to set aside their "disagreement" with Gandhi. He represented the "unyielding opposition to those that sought to enslave" India, not necessarily the political and social vision of Indians who have now broken those chains.

By the time Nehru wrote the letter in 1945, the decision of the "representatives of free India" was not an abstract hypothetical. Since it fought and won by a landslide its first election in 1936, the Congress got a sense of the aspiration of the "people" beyond the removal of colonial rule. The experience of building an electoral organization, and addressing concerns in meetings and rallies, gave the congressional leaders a sense of the challenges the material conditions of the country posed in creating a stable basis for popular government. An increasing majority in the Congress began to acknowledge that the "people" could not be presumed to exist independent of their necessities, especially when those necessities were so acute. In a 1937 speech demanding the convening of a constituent assembly for Indians, Jawaharlal Nehru said that "they cry aloud for succour, these unhappy millions of our countrymen We talk of *swaraj* and independence, but in human terms it means relief to the masses from their unutterable sorrow and misery."¹⁰⁰

A new postcolonial polity for India, in this telling, necessarily addressed the material conditions of Indian society. The language of development and modernization was to be the nationalist language through which Congress could plausibly claim to speak for the people of independent India. It could promise an "ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity," thereby "attaining [India's] rightful place in the world." It was to be the basis of its postcolonial legitimacy, once the fight against colonial rule was over. The Congress's program in the years leading up to independence included central planning, state-led industrialization, and land reform.¹⁰¹

These goals required a strong and centralized state machinery, especially if one had to address the problem of underdevelopment and inequality; one needed a state powerful enough to overwhelm what Ronald Herring has called "the embedded particularities" at the local level.¹⁰² Congress would therefore preserve much of the infrastructure of the immense colonial state machinery—two-thirds of the Constitution was derived from the colonial 1935 Government of India Act. The argument contra Gandhi was that it was not the state itself that was the problem, but by whom and for what ends its powers were used.¹⁰³

This claim about the necessity of the modern state, voiced by Nehru and various other leaders of the

Congress, can be divided into two related arguments. In the first version, elimination of poverty and economic development was the major—or even the primary demand—of the Indian masses; demands that congressional leadership became increasingly aware of through the electoral campaigns in the last decade of colonial rule. Given the advent of universal franchise and electoral democracy after independence, the postcolonial regime had to be able to fulfil those demands. The consensus amongst the Congress elites was that they could only be met through a project of state-led investment and growth. Only a strong *centralized* state could execute such a program. Hence, Congress would not be transformed into a “society to serve the people” advancing the “constructive program” at the village level, as Gandhi had wanted,¹⁰⁴ but would be a modern political party, asking for votes on a platform to deliver material wellbeing.¹⁰⁵ Building a centralized state was the necessary first step towards fulfilling that mandate. We can call this version the “democratic argument” for the state.

The second version was a significant variation on this theme. In this version, the demands for eradication of poverty and better material conditions reflected not a realized consensus on a path of economic development, but a yet inchoate dissatisfaction amongst the masses about the social condition. These dissatisfactions could transform themselves into rebellious uprisings, destabilizing the nascent regime. These were not idle speculations. In the years leading up to independence, India witnessed both the biggest labor strike and the biggest peasant rebellion in its history, not to mention the extraordinarily bloody religious strife leading up to the partition of the country. To the administrators—roles that Nehru and Congress leaders were stepping into, leaving behind their role of movement builders—the cacophony of contending interests and the potential threat to regime stability was too risky to ignore. A strong centralized state not only had the capability to deliver the change that people demanded (per the “democratic argument”), but also the capacity to manage this potential for unrest. We can call this the “managerial argument” for the state. This line of argument provided a justification for the repressive apparatus of the state—in part explaining why the Constituent Assembly was unwilling to repeal some of the more notorious provisions of colonial law like preventive detention and sedition. However, its scope was considerably wider than that. It also foresaw a vast regime of technocratic bodies that could undertake precise calculations and planning for necessary social reengineering, as well as a pedagogical role for the officers of the state, inculcating values of democracy and rule of law amongst the subjects newly turned citizens. The managerial argument was a response to the anxiety about democracy and mass action that we have already noted regarding Gandhi, and which continued to haunt his successors to the leadership of Congress. Instead of

Congress volunteers as Gandhi had envisioned, Nehru felt that the task of managing the masses was better suited to the tried and tested mechanisms of the modern state.

Both the democratic and the managerial argument supplied justifications not just for the state but also for its centralization. With the former, the higher the degree of centralization of the institutions of the state, especially its deliberative and decision making aspects, the greater is the centripetal force it exerts on the democratic process—thereby preventing the fracturing of the diverse coalition. With the latter, a centralized state is better able to perform both the repressive as well as technocratic-planning functions that are required of it to effectively manage dissensus.

The democratic argument and the managerial argument often overlapped in their justification for the state and its form (both requiring a high degree of centralization). Their crucial distinction was in their starting point. While the former was made primarily from the point of view of a political party, the latter was primarily from the standpoint of a government. In the context of the postcolonial transition, where the Congress party and the government was in effect one and the same—with Nehru being the leader of both—it is not surprising that they flowed into one another. The distinction between them would become more significant in the subsequent years after the independence.¹⁰⁶

The managerial argument also responded to an objection that could have been raised against the democratic argument. Against the latter one could justifiably claim that there was no reason to suppose that Nehru (or other presumptive rulers) possessed a superior knowledge vis-à-vis Gandhi as to what the “people” really wanted, or that in politics any such unambiguous and unalterable set of programmatic aspirations even exist around which to build an end-oriented project. Yet, it was precisely as a response to such an uncertainty and lack of consensual aspiration that the managerial argument became necessary. While the Gandhian model required a level of neighborly love amongst citizens, a modern state did not. What the state offered instead was the necessary ideological and institutional apparatus to address the conditions of contending aspirations and conflicting interests that marked the moment of independence. The Constituent Assembly sought to create institutions that could manage the multiplicity of social life, and provide forums for contestation and deliberation among conflictual interests. This has been an enduring justification for the modern state—one that Gandhi had sought to counter, and one that Nehru and the Constituent Assembly reaffirmed.

Conclusion: From the Anticolonial to the Postcolonial

The Ambedkarite and Nehruvian critiques of Gandhi—expanded by others as well—could be viewed as sharing

a common starting point, though arriving at different conclusions. One way of reading Gandhi's insistence on privileging means over ends is privileging the avoidance of conflict over other goals that a political project might espouse. What he scrupulously insisted on was that any such project had to be first and foremost attendant to means that could avoid even the potential of conflict and strife. In focusing on the phenomenon of conflict, his world view did not sufficiently engage with the possibility that conflicts are often manifestations of incipient hierarchies, exploitation, and deprivation within social life.

The Ambedkarite line of critique would have argued that this failure was a deliberate choice. Gandhi was not only blind to the exercise of social power amongst Indians, he implicitly welcomed it. The decentralized system of obeisance and order that such a network of power facilitated acted as a crucial resource for him: to ensure the internal cohesiveness of the anti-colonial movement, and then as a way of consolidating a post-colonial order. Anti-colonial movements, and more broadly any mass mobilizations against an external enemy, have a tendency to destabilize internal habituated hierarchies and to generate conditions for long-suppressed internal conflicts against indigenous networks of domination. It is precisely such an effect that Ambedkar and similarly minded critiques of Gandhi wanted to invigorate, and they felt that Gandhi's project was to neutralize that possibility. His was a technique honed through the management of the anti-colonial movement, and then sought to be extended to consolidate a postcolonial regime. What once was justified as necessary for a unified opposition to colonial rule could then only be understood as a demand for the continued acquiescence of the exploited to their own exploitation. This line of critique signified a current of postcolonial political thought that sought to extend the notion of emancipation beyond the political freedom from colonial rule, and to emphasize divisions between the interests of the dominated and the dominant within the indigenous society once the divisions between the colonizer and the colonized were consigned to history.

The Nehruvian line of critique, on the other hand, saw Gandhi as lacking the conceptual tools—rather than the intention—to engage with the concrete nature of the dissensus that produced conflicts. Gandhi, Nehru wrote, understood only “absolute war or absolute peace”—that is, the presence or absence of conflict.¹⁰⁷ “Anything in between he did not understand.”¹⁰⁸ The moral abstractions of peace/war as the basic duality of human condition left him without the conceptual tools to pass judgements regarding different forms of contestations and struggles that gave rise to conflicts. Viewing both history and politics as inescapably marked by violence, he could only hope to constitute a collective self outside of history and politics. He could

not speak to the aspirations of a postcolonial reclamation of historical categories like progress or development—one that informed not just Nehru, but a host of other Third-Worldist modernizers. Nor could he address the complex political calculus of governance that confronted the post-colonial elites. His vision remained, to misappropriate the words of Sheldon Wolin, one of (non-colonial) eternity warning (post-colonial) time.

Taken together, these two lines of critique—Gandhi as a conservative seeking to preserve existing social hierarchies, and as an ahistorical thinker of utopias—constituted the field of political criticism of Gandhi at the moment of postcolonial transition. His vision did not appeal to the postcolonial governance project of the elites, neither could it inspire the struggles of those seeking to challenge that project from below. To put it another way, Gandhi's vision found no home in the nascent political constellation being reoriented around emerging axes of rulers and ruled, domination and emancipation, produced by the shift from a colonial to a postcolonial world.

All of which brings us back to the paradox we began with—that of arguably one of the most influential anti-colonial leader's marginalization in the postcolonial moment. We began by characterizing Gandhi's vision as arguing for a complete break from the colonial condition—not just as a political fact of subjugation, but the entire conceptual repertoire of Western modernity. Now however we can read the Ambedkarite and Nehruvian critiques as alleging a failure on Gandhi's part to break from the colonial moment sufficiently. For the Ambedkarites, Gandhi demanded a continuation of the marginalized's acquiescence, justified through a common struggle against the colonizing outsiders, thereby obstructing the possibility of newer struggles to emerge liberated from the logic of anti-colonial solidarity and unity of all Indians. For the Nehruvians, Gandhi's continued insistence on equating historical progress and modernity with colonial domination impaired the ability to formulate a post-colonial path of development and governance metric outside of the shadow of the colonial past. They could both be read as saying that it was they, rather than Gandhi, who were ready to make a break with the colonial past, formulating projects for the postcolonial present—even though those projects might rely upon distinctly colonial inheritances, the most significant of which was the centralized modern state. The key to the paradox then lies in the distinction between the terms non-colonial and post-colonial.

Gandhi's most significant discursive move was to invert the binaries of state/ society, progress/ stasis, and modernity/ tradition that the colonial discourse had produced as alibis to colonial domination. Yet in his inversion Gandhi ended up reascribing those binaries, but in reverse. He held up the traditional social order as a resistive counter-point to the colonial political rule. The necessary condition for the reassertion of the

colonized self was a rejection of modernity, both its political institutions and social practices. It was a condemnation of modernity, not a critical analysis of its instantiations. Consequently, there was no project for how modern institutions and processes—say, the state or capitalism—could be restructured, rectified, or overcome, but an argument as to why they needed to be rejected.¹⁰⁹ What would succeed that rejection was a social condition whose principal characteristic was its negation of the effects of colonial modernity. As an act of negation it was bound in a constitutive relationship with what it was negating. Hence, the historical basis of Gandhi's social imagination remained the colonial condition. His vision for a new social imaginary persisted within the conceptual constellation of *non-colonial*, rather than the historical moment of the *post-colonial*.

The Gandhian paradox can be seen as a part of a similarly puzzling global turn during the period of decolonization of mid-twentieth century. Anti-colonial movements in several places generated various alternative ideas of organizing polities—whether at a supra (i.e., federations) as well as infra (as was the case with Gandhi) levels, often as an explicit reaction to the centralized colonial state. Yet it was the modern centralized state form that prevailed in the postcolonial moment almost everywhere. Mimicry of the established Western political imaginary does indeed tell us something non-trivial about this development. But a simple mapping of a continuity on that register ends up flattening the historical specificity and socio-political configuration of those moments. The centralized state triumphed not just as an unreflective acceptance of colonial inheritance, but through aspiration, anxieties, and indeed, conflicts, that the opening up of postcolonial futures inaugurated. I obviously present only a part of the story of one such instance. But through this relatively minor lens, I hope to suggest a way of analyzing the postcolonial state—its emergence and subsequent problems—that goes beyond the purely ideational binary of colonial/ non-colonial and onto the messy historicity of the postcolonial landscape.

Notes

- 1 Parel 2006; Mantena 2012a; Mehta 2010; Skaria 2016; Bilgrami 2014; Devji 2012; Terchek 2006; Godrej 2006, to name only a few.
- 2 This article, given its limited scope, does not deal with Jinnah, the Muslim League, or the Partition, all of which are significant in terms of both Gandhi's politics and the postcolonial transition. The immensity of those issues vis-à-vis the limited scope of an article informed my choice. Given such limits, I chose to focus on the debates about social change and the state as it played around the Indian constitution making process—hence focusing on Ambedkar and Nehru.

- 3 See, for example, Escobar 1995 and Scott 1998.
- 4 Mantena 2012b.
- 5 Scholars have pointed out Gandhi's denial of the primacy of history as a mode of self-understanding. Moral development, as opposed to historical development, happens through a continuous process of self-realization, a creative reinterpretation of the self at both the individual and the collective level. This is not determined by the linear narrative of history—one of economic development or modernization. Instead, it is a dialogic process constituted through discipline and suffering. See Nandy 1983, Skaria 2016, Chatterjee 1986, and Devji 2010.
- 6 Mehta 2010, 358.
- 7 Gandhi [1948], 333–335.
- 8 Gandhi [1929a], 54.
- 9 Skaria 2002, 957.
- 10 “To conduct himself in such a way that his behavior will not hamper the well-being of his neighbours”; Gandhi [1939a], 134.
- 11 Terchek 2006, 202–203.
- 12 “Gandhism succeeded in opening up the possibility by which the largest popular element of the nation—the peasantry—could be appropriated within the evolving political forms of the new Indian state;” Chatterjee 1986, 124.
- 13 Mantena 2012a.
- 14 Ibid, 457.
- 15 Ibid, 458, 461.
- 16 Gandhi [1939a], 196.
- 17 Gandhi [1910], 474.
- 18 Gandhi [1939b], 134.
- 19 Ibid., 134.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 While Gandhi's opposition to the modern state form and its institutions is well documented—in his most well known work *Hind Swaraj*, for example—there have been important revisionist works that have challenged the prevalent view of Gandhi as an uncompromising anti-statist—most significantly by Anthony Parel (2012) and Bhiku Parekh (need date). In Parel's reading, Gandhi was the proponent of a (quasi-liberal) limited state. While I have a very different reading than them, for the purpose of this article the limited point I want to make is that Gandhi had a strong preference for non-state rather than state-led actions for social change.
- 22 See n. 38.
- 23 Gandhi [1945], 390.
- 24 Gandhi [1920], 217.
- 25 Gandhi 1997, 59.
- 26 Ibid, 60.
- 27 “The chief thing, however, to be remembered is that, without lawyers, courts could not have been

- established or conducted, and without the latter the English could not rule”; *ibid.*, 61.
- 28 Gandhi [1928a], 140.
- 29 Skaria 2011, 210.
- 30 Chakrabarty 2015, 572–608.
- 31 Gandhi 1960, 4.
- 32 Gandhi [1931a], 187.
- 33 Gandhi [1929a], 53.
- 34 Adding that “the proprietors of land . . . had therefore only to adopt his ideal of trusteeship and their troubles would end;” Gandhi 1946a, 185.
- 35 Gandhi [1929b], 110, and Gandhi [1931d], 101–106. Gandhi formed a trade union in Ahmedabad on the principles of trusteeship. “If I had my way,” he wrote, “I would regulate all the labour organizations of India after the Ahmedabad model”. Gandhi [1941], “Labour.”
- 36 *Ibid.*, 3.
- 37 In at least one interview, faced with an explicit question regarding the complete lack of willingness on the part of property owners to act as trustees, Gandhi said that he can countenance the state taking over property “with the minimum exercise of violence”; Gandhi [1934], 318.
- 38 In the very same interview, he goes on to say that in his opinion “the violence of private ownership is less injurious than the violence of the State,” and that while “we know of many cases where men have adopted trusteeship, but none where the State has lived for the poor”; *ibid.*, 318–319.
- 39 Gandhi consistently opposed movements for boycotts, withdrawal of labor, or rent strikes by peasants on this ground. Gandhi [1921a], 158–159.
- 40 Gandhi [1933], 395.
- 41 Gandhi [1915], 387.
- 42 Gandhi [1946b], 325–326.
- 43 Gandhi did not have a *corporatist* vision of the village (i.e., village as a template for harmonious social order) but rather as providing an autonomous site for the development of *individual* self-governance; Mantena 2012b.
- 44 For an instructive genealogy, as well as comparative contextualization of Gandhi’s ideas amongst the contemporary discourse surrounding the village, see *ibid.*
- 45 Chatterjee 1993, 237–238.
- 46 Gandhi [1946b], 326. For further elaboration of this plan, see, Gandhi [1946c], at 371.
- 47 Gandhi [1946b].
- 48 The term ‘loosely federated village republic’ comes from S.N. Agarwal, who in 1946 wrote a Gandhian Constitution for India, with Gandhi’s blessings; Agarwal 1946.
- 49 Austin 1972, 26–39.
- 50 Gandhi [1946b], 327.
- 51 Sarkar 2011, 175.
- 52 Gandhi 1941, the chapter titled “Economic Inequality”.
- 53 Ambedkar 1943.
- 54 Mantena 2012b.
- 55 Ambedkar 1948.
- 56 Ambedkar 1946, 296.
- 57 *Ibid.*
- 58 *Ibid.*
- 59 Ambedkar 1936, Appendix II, A Reply to Gandhi.
- 60 See, Gandhi 1941, “Kisans.”
- 61 Sarkar 1983, 183–187; Henningham 1976; and Hardiman 1981. In Champaran, there was a confluence of interests amongst both the peasants and the money-lender/ merchants against the British planters, while in Kheda, (relatively) prosperous peasant proprietors were demanding a decrease in their revenue.
- 62 Gandhi [1928b], 390.
- 63 Ambedkar 1979, 271.
- 64 Jaffrelot 2005, 66.
- 65 Ambedkar 1946, 250.
- 66 *Ibid.*, 281.
- 67 *Ibid.*, 281; emphasis added.
- 68 *Ibid.*, 296.
- 69 Ambedkar 1948.
- 70 The members of the Constituent Assembly, who at different stages lamented the absence of Gandhian principles in the constitutional design, were T. Prakasam, Mahavir Tyagi, Damodar Swarup Seth, Pandit Thakur Das Bhargava, and H.V. Kamath.
- 71 Jaffrelot 2005, 109–11.
- 72 A member of the Constituent Assembly, T.T. Krishnamachari remarked that “the chapter on Directive Principles is a veritable dustbin of sentiment . . . sufficiently resilient as to permit any individual of this house to ride his hobby horse into it.” Krishnamachari’s views find support in the history of how the directive principles were devised, as a repository of political aspirations of various kinds that could not be incorporated into the juridical architecture of the Constitution.
- 73 Ambedkar 1946, ch. III.
- 74 While Ambedkar wanted a wider application of horizontal rights, he only succeeded in including a few: Articles 15(2) (access to shops, restaurants, etc.); 17 (prohibition of untouchability); 23 (prohibition of forced labor); and 25(2)(b) (access to Hindu religious institutions).
- 75 Hauser 1994, 8, 66.
- 76 Nehru 1946, 507.
- 77 Gandhi 1997, 30.
- 78 *Ibid.*, 31.
- 79 “The Congress was the only organization representing the whole of India”; Gandhi [1931c], 65.
- 80 Gandhi [1931b], 45.

- 81 Amin 1984, 52.
 82 Ibid., 26–27; 54–55. A year after Gandhi's speech in Gorakhpur, an attack on a police station in nearby Chauri Chaura led Gandhi to call off the first Non-Cooperation movement; see, Amin 1995.
 83 Ibid., 55; emphasis added.
 84 See Sarkar 1985 and Arnold 1982.
 85 "The nation must be disciplined to handle mass movements in a sober and methodical manner." "Volunteers"—Congress functionaries to specially "train" the masses—were to be deployed for this process; Gandhi [1921b], 159.
 86 Gandhi [1920], 247.
 87 The seminal contribution of the historians of the Subaltern Studies collective has been to highlight the existence and significance of this gap. It was, as they wrote, "the index of an important historical truth, that is, the failure of the Indian bourgeoisie to speak for the nation"; Guha 1982, 1, 4; also see, Guha 1998.
 88 Nehru 1988, 505–507.
 89 Ibid., 508.
 90 Ibid., 508.
 91 Ibid., 509.
 92 Ibid., 508; emphasis added.
 93 Ibid., 508.
 94 Ibid., 509.
 95 Ibid.
 96 Ibid.
 97 Nehru 1946, 364; emphasis added.
 98 Chatterjee 1986, 124; also see Chatterjee 1993, 163–167.
 99 Kaviraj 2010, 115.
 100 Nehru 1968, 91.
 101 Frankel 1978.
 102 Herring 1999, 306.
 103 Dasgupta 2014, 228–242.
 104 Gandhi [1948], 333.
 105 Nehru 1946, 520.
 106 Nehru witnessed Congress (perhaps predictably) transforming itself into a party of power, with local notables deftly translating traditional forms of hierarchies and relations of dependence, into political dominance—turning the party small-c conservative rather than transformative; Frankel 1978. Alienated from the political maneuverings of his colleagues, he turned his attention to the domain of statecraft—to the planners and bureaucrats—rather than the work of launching a democratic movement to challenge the conservative basis of social power from below; Kaviraj 2010, 25; Gopal 1979, 74–75, and 145–149. The state became therefore a technocratic rather than a popular instrument of social change. As we have seen, Ambedkar recognized the importance of focusing on the democratizing

dimensions—of conceiving the state as a site for struggle rather than a technocratic instrument.

- 107 Nehru 1936, 128.
 108 Ibid.
 109 Kaviraj 2010, 35.

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