

Saving “Mahatma” Gandhi

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1. There are various kinds of desire in us, to name a few, desire for sex, desire for money, desire for fame, desire for power, most importantly, desire for self-preservation. It appears that all these desires are compounded. For example, when we want to fulfill sexual desire, we feel that in order to get our sex partner(s) we should have money, fame, power, seduction, or all of these. It is also true that when we fail in fulfilling our desires for these objects, we often feel frustrated or get angry. Let's call it a complex of desire and violence. Each human being is almost always being driven by this complex. This complex belongs to the domain of *kāma*(*kāmāvacara*), if expressed in a Buddhist term.

2. The builders of our nations well understood that basic desires or instincts should be sufficiently fulfilled. Therefore, they do not decree the

prohibition of kāmīc activities, for example, sexual activities. But they do think that people should not harm the life and property of other nationals. The basic aim of the constitution of each nation is, thus, to establish the system which enables most of those nationals to fulfill their basic instincts.

3. According to *Aggañña Sutta*: On the Knowledge of Beginnings in *Dīgha Nikāya*, sometimes an ordinary human being takes life, takes what is not given, commits sexual misconduct, tells lies, indulges in slander, harsh speech, or idle chatter, is grasping, malicious, or of wrong views.¹⁾ All these may be called ten evils. We must understand that all sexual conduct is misconduct, as far as a celibate is concerned. About two millenium has passed since this sutta began to be handed down to us. But there seemed no progress made in that modern human beings are morally not different from those peoples of the ancient India.

4. In his short writing “Why War?” [Warum Krieg?, 1932], Sigmund Freud (1826-1939) argues that there are two kinds of human instincts: one is erotic instincts which seek to preserve and unite, and those which seek to destroy and kill. The first group is called erotic or sexual; the second is called aggressive or destructive instinct.²⁾ Both of them are essential to the phenomena of life, which arise from the concurrent or mutually opposing action of both.³⁾ In most cases, these two instincts are intermingled. For

1) See *Thus Have I Heard: The Long Discourses of the Buddha, Dīgha Nikāya*, trans. M. Walshe (Wisdom Publications London, 1987), p. 408 ff.

2) Sigmund Freud *The Standard Edition of The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: The Hogarth Press And The Institute of Psycho-Analysis), vol. 22, p. 209 ff.

example, “the instinct of self-preservation is of an erotic kind, but it must nevertheless have aggressiveness as its disposal if it is to fulfill its purpose. So, too, the instinct of love, when it is directed toward object, stands in need of some contribution from the instinct for mastery if it is in any way to obtain possession of that object.”⁴⁾ Freud continues: “It is very rarely that an action is the work of a *single* instinctual impulse (which must in itself be compounded of Eros and destructiveness.)”⁵⁾ According to the last passage, a single instinctual impulse, whether it appears erotic or destructive, is not single but compounded of eros and destructiveness.

Based on his understanding of instincts, Freud points out “a lust for aggression and destructions”⁶⁾ as one of several motives of war, and he adds: “there is no use in trying to get rid of men’s aggressive instincts.”⁷⁾ He only suggests an indirect method of employing eros to counter against the aggressive instincts.⁸⁾ Freud sadly but understandably ended with a rather pessimistic note about the future of mankind.

5. Those ten evils can be roughly put into two camps of sexual and destructive instincts, although we have to admit that there is no absolute distinction between them. Taking life, harsh speech and being malicious appear to belong to the destructive instincts, but committing sexual

3) *Ibid.*

4) *Ibid.*, pp. 209-210.

5) *Ibid.*, p. 210.

6) *Ibid.*, p. 210.

7) *Ibid.*, p. 211.

8) See *Ibid.*, p. 212 ff.

(mis)conduct looks a direct expression of eros. Stealing, telling lies, indulging in slander, idle chatter, grasping, and having wrong views apparently belong to both camps.

6. The reason why this author discusses *Aggañña Sutta* and Freud together, is to argue that sexual desire and aggressiveness are almost inseparably compounded, and that we are not able to know the full implication of the Celibacy/Enlightenment theme unless we widen our scope to include the issue of violence and its national, racial, and religious origin.

7. M. K. Gandhi(1869-1948) was the one who had a strong conviction that sexual desire, violence, and even palate, are inseparably related to each other, as he demanded unwavering pledge from ashram(community) residents. An example is the pledges of Satyagraha Ashram, founded in 1915 with the objective: "Its members should qualify themselves for, and make a constant endeavor towards, the service of the country, not inconsistent with the universal welfare."⁹⁾ The ideal human character, namely, self-realization, is achieved only through service to the country and the world. To qualify oneself to do such service, one had to pledge to practice the following virtues: truth, nonviolence or love, celibacy(brahmacharya), control of the palate, nonstealing, nonpossession or poverty, physical labor, self-reliance(swadeshi), fearlessness, abolition of

9) R. Iyer(ed.), *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol,2, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 535.

untouchability and tolerance.¹⁰⁾ Gandhi believed that only through the observance of the pledges could human beings with the physical body commit only the minimum degree of violence and become active beings capable of constructing a nonviolent society.

Gandhi was convinced that practicing nonviolence and celibacy is indispensable to realizing truth as he maintained: “That a man who has known truth can be lecherous is as inconceivable as that darkness may exist despite the sun shining.”¹¹⁾ Gandhi also believed that achieving celibacy is directly related to control of the palate as he explained as follows:

The observance of *brahmacharya* has been found, from experience, to be extremely difficult so long as one has not acquired mastery over taste. Control of the palate has, therefore, been placed as a principle by itself. Eating is necessary only for sustaining the body and keeping it a fit instrument for service, and must never be practised for self-indulgence. Food must, therefore, be taken, like medicine, under proper restraint.

In pursuance of this principle one must eschew exciting foods, such as spices and condiments. Meat, liquor, tobacco, bhang, etc., are excluded from the Ashram. This principle requires abstinence from feasts or dinners which have pleasure as their object.¹²⁾

10) R. Iyer (ed.), *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatama Gandhi* vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 536-539.

11) *Ibid.*, pp. 157-158.

12) *Ibid.*, p. 537. *CWMSG E-Book* vol. 42, p. 108.

Gandhi's emphasis upon the relationship between celibacy and control of the palate, reminds us of a passage from the Chapter Organs (Indriyas) in Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*. It runs in this way: "The sexual organs are absent from the Rūpadhātu 1) because the beings who are born in this sphere have abandoned the desire for sexual union, and 2) because these organs are ugly."¹³⁾ Furthermore, odor, taste, the consciousness of odor, and the consciousness of taste are also lacking in the world of Rūpadhātu. Odor and taste are lacking there, for they are "morsel-food" and no one is born into Rūpadhātu who is not detached from this food. Since odor and taste are lacking, the consciousness of odor and taste are lacking too.¹⁴⁾

We should be reminded that in the progressive steps towards realizing Nirvana, one has to go beyond Kāmadhātu to Rūpadhātu where the sexual organs dropped.

8. Who killed Gandhi?

It was Nathuram Godse (1910-1949) who assassinated Gandhi, believing in military forces in the struggle against the Muslims. Godse was an activist with the Hindu Mahasabha, a Hindu nationalist organization, which was originally founded in 1915 to counter the Muslim League and the secular Indian National Congress. For Godse and Hindu Mahasabha, the desire for self-preservation of Hindus against Muslims, was the most important

13) *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*, Louis de La Vallée Poussin, vol. 1 tr. Leo M. Pruden (Asian Humanities Press, Berkeley), p. 173.

14) See Chapter 1, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*,

one. They wanted to be preserved and protected by military forces and money.

The immediate motive for the assassination is usually ascribed to Gandhi's January 13, 1948 decision to fast to the death unless the Indian central government reversed a decision to withhold the transfer of 55 crore (550 million) rupees to the government of Pakistan. The transfer had been specified in the partition agreement, but the Indian government had refused to complete it, complaining of continued Pakistani rebel occupation of disputed parts of Kashmir. The Indian government immediately reversed its decision to withhold the funds, which infuriated Godse and his fellow Hindu radicals.¹⁵⁾

9. The death of Tom Fox(1951-2006)

Gandhi, a non-violent person has the vision of a nation of no army, or no common police.¹⁶⁾ Then the ultimate destiny he could face was his own death. The similar self-sacrifice was made when Tom Fox, an American Quaker peace activist, decided to go Iraq, protesting American military action against this country, showing solidarity with common Iraqi, his own death was forestalled.

In November 2005, Tom Fox, a member of Langley Hill(Va.) Meeting, and three other members of the Christian Peacemaker Team in Iraq were kidnapped by a group calling itself the Swords of Righteousness Brigade.

15) See *Wikipedia*, July 7, 2007.

16) For this, see the following passage. "No doubt I cherish a fond vision that we may be able to do without the police, for I would call them not 'police' but 'social reformers'." *CWMGE Book*, vol. 95, p. 19.

Their lives were threatened if all Iraqi detainees were not immediately released. Messages of support for these peacemakers came from around the world, including many from the Muslim community. On March 10, 2006, Tom Fox's body was recovered in Baghdad. On March 23, his three fellow peacemakers were rescued by multinational forces without a shot being fired. On the wake of this event, *Friends Journal*, a Quaker Journal, published several excerpts from Tom Fox's online journal. There is a relevant passage to our discussion of love and violence on the individual and national level. The following passage of Kenneth Boulding(1910-1993), Quaker economist, peace activist, poet and religious mystic struck Fox:

Those who love their country in the light of their love of God, express that love of country by endeavoring to make it respected rather than feared, loved rather than hated. But those who love only their country express that love by trying to make it feared and succeed all too often in making it hated.¹⁷⁾

On this passage commented Fox: "The love of country must always be subordinate to love of God. Love of country alone sets us on a course towards the disasters that have befallen other countries over the centuries. Charting a new course must begin now, before it is too late."¹⁸⁾

17) Quoted from *Friends Journal*, May 2006, p. 7.

18) *Ibid*.

10. Those citizens who are mostly working in a specific national k m vacara, do not, more accurately, cannot envision a nation without military forces or police. They do not save Gandhi nor Tom Fox, as long as they live in the realm of k madh tu, since the principle of self-preservation and protection necessitate them to collect the large amount of physical forces in the realms of economics, politics, foreign policy, sciences, and more importantly in their daily lives. It seems that all these physical forces ultimately culminate in military forces, which was, however, not ultimate at all for both Gandhi and Fox.

11. “Celibacy/Enlightenment” cannot save Gandhi

Celibate monks, not addressing the issue of violence both of individual and national level, know at most the half truth of their own existence, since their sustenance was possible only by the reception of food and clothes from lay persons living in the national complex of k m vacara.

Buddhist Scholars of both sexes, committing themselves to kāmīc activities, including enjoying the odor and taste of the best gourmet coffee or tea, but not asking the relatedness between desire and violence, may be ignorant of their existence in a nation. We indulge ourselves with enjoying all organs including sexual organs, and have become blind not to see violence personal and national level of our life. This ignorance disables our ability to be enlightened to the patriotic mechanism of self-preservation and protection, which killed Gandhi and Fox.

As long as most citizens live in the complex of desire and violence, and are being constantly driven by it, it may be impossible to save lives of Gandhi and Fox. If that is true, we should be satisfied with saving their

Mahatmas(Great Souls) only, perhaps to the end of human k mic history.

Arguing about the personal and national complex of desire and violence is a way to challenge the self-indulging feature of (Korean) Søn Buddhism, which is suggested in the Celibacy/Enlightenment theme itself. And note that compassionate activities are principally denied in any type of self-indulgence. ■