

Gandhi; the Art of Conversation and Dissolving Conflicts

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Conflict and social living seems as natural a pair as harmony and social living; the former perhaps even more natural. The dominant sense of the term 'conflict' is an attitude of antagonism due to irreconcilable differences or what are perceived as irreconcilable differences. Conflicts though as old as human kind itself seems particularly endemic to modernity. Modes of conflict resolution have always been a pressing problem for humans in their mutual interactions with society. Historically in societies grounded in dominant religious traditions one appropriate mode of conflict resolution was in terms of an appeal to ethical religious categories like 'dharma' or within the framework of religious institutions like the church. Further when life was organised on a simpler rural basis conflicts were mostly between persons, or families or communities or tribes and resolved where they were generated. In modern societies conflicts have become larger than life. They are frequently intractable, impersonal and quickly acquire a global proportion. Also they seem the rule whenever there is an interaction involving any degree of living in the world together. Law as a mode of conflict resolution has been adopted by nations with national and international courts. There are other modes of conflict resolution such as wars, insurgencies and vast scale terrorism.

It could be said that modes of conflict resolution in modern civilisation are based on the underlying philosophical assumptions of the primacy of self-interest, on anthropocentrism, on materialism, and therefore they cannot escape these parameters. Thus conflict resolution is at best a compromise, a furthering or curtailing of interests and never a genuine resolution in the sense of reconciliation and removal of the source of the conflict, which we might term as 'dissolution' of the conflict.

Perhaps the very first requisite of such dissolution or even an attempt at such dissolution would be to have a conversation. Such a conversation as a mode of resolving a conflict would call for some intellectual and moral qualities like humility, understanding, sensitivity to the others viewpoint, acceptance of a different way of looking at things, patience, courage to accept one's own view as sometimes mistaken, an ability to learn, and an ability to listen. It would also be tremendously aided by a sense of humor and an ability to laugh at oneself.

In section one of this paper I want to look at Gandhi as a modern who excelled in the use of conversation to dissolve conflict situations. The section will therefore look at Gandhi in his historical contextuality in terms of the kind of relationships that he shared with his contemporaries. Notable here are the conversations he had with the great poet Rabindranath Tagore, Conversations in person and through letters. Also and very differently the conversation that Gandhi had with Savarkar, which shall be examined in Section two, in person and through

his writing, primarily the Hind Swaraj. This examination can teach modernity how beyond an ethics of reconciliation there is also an ethics of irreconcilable difference. Conversation and an ability to listen can contribute tremendously to both the endeavours

Section I

Gandhi and Tagore

*From our master, the Mahatma, -may our devotion for Him never grow less-we must learn the truth of love in all its purity, but the science and art of building up Swaraj is a vast subject, its pathways are difficult to traverse and take time. For this task, aspiration and emotion must be there but no less must study and thought be there likewise. For it the economist must think, the mechanic must labour, the educationist and statesman must teach and contrive. In a word, the mind of the country must exert itself in all directions. Above all, the spirit of enquiry throughout the whole country must be kept intact and untrammelled, its mind not made timid or inactive, by compulsion, open or secret. [“The call of Truth” by Rabindranath Tagore. (From *The Modern Review* for October 1921)]*

The poet of Asia as Lord Hardinge called Dr Tagore, is fast becoming, if he has not already become, the poet of the world. Increasing prestige has brought him increasing responsibility.....He is naturally jealous of his country’s reputation. He says he has striven hard to find himself in tune with the present movement. He confesses that he is baffled. He can find nothing for his lyre in the din and bustle of non-cooperation. In three forceful letters, he has endeavoured to give expression to his misgivings, and has come to the conclusion that non-cooperation is not dignified enough for the India of his vision, that it is a doctrine of negation and despair. He fears that it is a doctrine of separation, exclusiveness narrowness and negation.....In all humility I shall endeavour to answer the Poet’s doubts. I may fail to convince him or the reader who may have been touched by his eloquence, but I would like to assure him and India that non-cooperation in conception is not any of the things he fears, and he need have no cause to be ashamed of his country for having adopted non-cooperation. [“A Reply to Tagore” by M.K.Gandhi.]

Mahatma Gandhi and Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore owed to each other the title’s of Mahatma and Gurudev. In a relationship that spanned for about 26 years (from 1915 to 1941) they differed on many issues of national and international importance as on dietics and the eating of puris. When Gandhi went to meet Tagore for the very first time in 1915 at Shantiniketan, as documented by Gandhi’s biographer Shankar Bose, *This meeting between the two men, both so firmly rooted in Indian culture, was a picture in contrast and they discussed many matters including Gandhi’s favorite subject of dietics. Gandhi maintained that for making puris good grains were converted into poison by frying the same in ghee or oil. Tagore, the lover of art and life, said that he had been eating puris all his life and they did him no harm.* (Bose1991; 153)

Puris were of course only symptomatic of deeper differences between two great men who were historical contemporaries and disagreed as men do about issues close to their heart and sometimes far less serious ones too. Tagore differed from Gandhi regarding the role of Charkha in awakening national consciousness and bringing about Swaraj. He had deep reservations about

the mindless following of charkha against the exercise of individual freedom and reason. He further felt that small machines could be as stunting as larger machines admittedly were. He criticised the non-cooperation movement as negative and was concerned that the withdrawing of students from the schools positively harmed them and the country. Burning of foreign cloth was a crime in a country where so many could use the same clothes. Tagore and Gandhi differed on science and faith. All these were issues close to Gandhi's heart and, issues, responses to which made up Gandhi's own vision of Indian Nationalism. And yet Gandhi and Tagore made friends they talked, they had intimate conversations, in person and through letters. Gandhi visited Shantiniketan in 1915. After their 1915 meeting, Gandhi and Tagore met again in 1917 when Gandhi had gone to attend the session of the Indian national congress at Calcutta in 1917. On 12 April Tagore wrote to Gandhi criticising Gandhi's method of passive resistance. Tagore visited Ahmedabad as Gandhi had invited him to open the annual Gujarati Literary Conference in April 1920. Tagore spent a night at Sabarmati Ashram. In 1921 Tagore expressed reservations about the non-cooperation movement in *Modern review*. Gandhi tried to reassure him through his letter in *Young India*. After Gandhi was released from prison in 1924 Tagore sent C.F Andrews to meet him at Pune. Gandhi again visited Shantiniketan in 1925. Tagore visited Sabarmati ashram in 1931. When Gandhi undertook a fast unto death on 29th September 1932 against the communal award for the untouchables, He wrote to Tagore to seek his advice and support.

If you can bless the effort I want it you have been a candid friend often speaking your thoughts aloud. Though it can now be only during my fasts, I will yet prize your criticism if your heart condemns my action. I am not too proud to make an open confession of blunder.

In September Tagore visited Gandhi at Poona in 1932. They met again in Delhi in March 1936. Tagore shared his financial concerns with Gandhi on running the institution of Shantiniketan, over the next 5 years, and Gandhi helped him by arranging funds from donors. Gandhi and Tagore met for the last time in Shantiniketan in February 1940.

To look at the development of the friendship and the conversation side by side with the exchange of ideas that were sharply opposed to each other, is fascinating and a lesson in practical ahimsa understood as humility and love; and, the art of conversation. Such conversation when it is committed to realising truth through ahimsa interpreted in the Gandhian sense, as love, can break down conflicts and make possible genuine communication. Such conversations as seen above in the Gandhi Tagore exchange flow into life often transforming ideas while contemporaneously breaking barriers, a step at a time, till the parties once sharply opposed become friends who disagree but are no longer in conflict with each other. Conventional studies on Gandhian satyagraha can be well supplemented by looking at the contextuality of Gandhi and his conversations, as they are powerful sources of practical ahimsa at work and insights into developing a new ethics of argumentation. An ethics which though always necessary is even more so urgently required given the modern predicament of alienation and a breakdown of communication to such an extent that parties resort to extreme terror simply to enter into a dialogue with those whom they are hostile to and eventually hate as opposing viewpoints. The dialogue even when resolved does not ever dissolve. At best such resolution is akin to barter and compromise; always precarious, as bartering of human viewpoints must necessarily be. It at no time spills as friendship does, into lives, has no power to influence or transform. Conflict

resolution in modernity leaves all parties marginally dissatisfied, restlessly looking for better deals and hostile to other interests.

It is not as if, Gandhi had a complete lack of conviction about all he believed in. If anything Gandhi took time and effort to study conditions and develop opinions and was attached to visions like Charkha as constitutive of Ram Rajya. Yet he was able to accept, internalise and use, criticism to make friends rather than generate terrible conflicts which would then escalate as conflicts have a manner of doing. This, it is my belief, Gandhi was able to do, because he lived by a practical ahimsa as love and a commitment to truth that translated into an art of conversation which proceeded by listening to the hostile other till the hostility completely dissipated no matter if the disagreement remained. Gandhi believed in Ahimsa and Satya. Minimally Ahimsa meant non-violence and non-injury in thought, word and deed.

In the present paper I would like to examine the moral argument, which connects truth and ahimsa. That moral argument also furnishes the most effective internal route to conflict resolution down the highways of conversation and via the idea of love. The point, which I want to make here, is that Gandhi provides a philosophical framework in his conception of morality, which gives a new set of parameters within which a genuine dissolution of conflicts can be, a theoretical possibility.

Moving now to the way in which Gandhi's ideas are available to this kind of an argument Gandhi's conception of morality is beautifully articulated in terms of a trio of concepts; Truth, ahimsa and God. What makes Gandhi so important from the standpoint of moral Psychology and conflict resolution, in the present context, is the conception of ahimsa and the interrelationship between ahimsa and truth. I will like to look at the relationship between ahimsa and truth. I do this in the present context, to show Gandhian ahimsa as a powerfully potential mode of enabling conversations, which are dissolving of conflicts. In Gandhi truth and ahimsa are so inextricably linked up that they are like *the two sides of a coin*.

The concept of truth has been the subject of many different kinds of articulation and debate. There are of course difficulties in the Gandhian use of the concept. I shall not go into these complexities and concentrate for the present purpose on the strand of Gandhian thought about it, which to me has great significance for conflict resolution. This strand of Gandhian thought is related to what may be called moral episteme real or genuine knowledge of the other and of the self. The central idea here is that of the conquest of deception and self-deception. For human beings self-deception is almost inescapable. God is the only being who is necessarily free from self-deception. Hence, for Gandhi God and truth are one. Why is man in contrast almost doomed to a life of such self-deception? This is because man is endowed with a very powerful ego and it is the job as it were, of each man's ego to show him in the best possible light. The need for this projection arises primarily in the context of man's relationships with other human beings. My ego is eternally in competition with other egos. In this competition the only way to save my ego from being crushed to keep it inflated, is often, by deliberately distorting the reality of the other. Distorting another person's reality and distorting one's own reality are of course complementary processes. The illusions generated by the ego not only deny access to the reality of the other but they must at the same time deny access to one's own reality as well, or the primary motive behind misperceiving the other's reality, my own ego projection, would be lost. If the ego is so

distortive of inter personal knowledge situations how can real knowledge of the other proceed at all? The first step in Gandhi's framework is the practice of Ahimsa. Genuine ahimsa is incompatible with the demands of the ego. How can I count as practicing ahimsa if, in doing so, I am merely serving the interests of my ego? For in doing so I am doing him a moral injury. The way of ahimsa is the way of gradual overcoming of the ego and therefore the achievement of the truth of being. Ahimsa may often flower into love and such love much more clearly than ahimsa is the opposite of egoism. It may be said, as Gandhi indeed said, that love is the positive form of ahimsa.

The important thing is that if one sees the other from within one's own tumultuous ego centered scheme then the knowledge of the other will be definitely clouded by that scheme. Such knowledge is inherently incapable of doing justice to the reality of the other. On the other hand unselfish love, will help to get at that elusive truth of the other. For Gandhi then love is connected with non violence in the positive sense as with truth-and this means that it is love which helps one to get at the truth in knowing another person. That non-injury involves a positive aspect should be easy to see, as one would really be harming the other if one refrained from doing something that one could do to positively aid him. Further such ahimsa, as non-injury and positive compassion, can be internally actualised through a good feeling, which gradually grows into a love and respect of all things.

These ideas in Gandhi can, in my view, be taken as constitutive of a moral epistemology as a way of coming to know the other often in disagreement with oneself. Witness how even for the morally frail love can be a strongly uplifting emotion that leads to self-denial and overcoming of the ego in the relationship with the object of love. However Gandhian ahimsa as love was not a magical chant, a mantra that needed no effort. It proceeded by the commitment to truth and non-injury, but it needed the ability to listen, the humility to accept a mistake or error of judgment, a whole lot of moral courage to accept another's view as right. Most important of all it needed the art of intimate conversation, which gradually actualised and made possible a genuine understanding of the other from outside one's own conceptual ego centered framework. And truth and love were actualised somewhere in the middle of such conversations as they gradually, almost, insidiously spilt over into life as the opponents met and interacted on all kinds of other issues different from the ones that were in conflict. These other interactions aided the development of the practical ahimsa as love so that it became internal and spontaneous and very personal whereas perhaps it started out as a commitment to reaching truth by an impersonal large universal love of all and each as genuine human possibilities. To examine the ethics of argumentation that develops into a Gandhian art of conversation the Tagore Gandhi exchange seen above can be taken as a case study to reveal the following structure;

- 1) There is an entry into a conversation by first listening to the other and then seeking to address the contentious issue. This could be done on the basis of a purely impersonal, commitment to truth- seeking using a practical Ahimsa as non-injury in thought, word and deed, to facilitate knowledge of that other and his view.

- 2) After entering the conversation the development of certain moral and intellectual qualities like humility, courage, patience, persistence, sensitivity to the other's views, a sense of humour and ability to laugh at oneself, enables and sustains conversation and prevents it from breaking down

due to hardening of stances. This is an immanent possibility in any contentious conversation and this is what, could have happened but did not happen, with Gandhi and Tagore.

3) The conversation can continue over years and is aided if the, once disputants, make an effort to meet and interact in life like situations. A living together at Shantiniketan and Sabarmati possibly helped both Tagore and Gandhi to develop an affectionate understanding which far from obscuring a genuine ego-transcendent access to the other possibly uses elements of value, to aid, such an access. Even discussing puris helps conflicts from loosing a certain cutting edge, so to speak

4) The conversation often then transforms some part of the opinions held by the opponents as happened between Gandhi and Tagore with Gandhi accepting and asking for Tagore's criticism. Agreeing with Tagore that spinning alone was not a solution to all problems and needed to be supplemented by an active programme involving better sanitation, anti malaria campaign, settlement of village disputes and many more beneficial activities. Tagore changed certain practices in his ashram as a consequence of changed opinion on untouchability. Tagore also supported some of Gandhi's fasting, which he did not really approve of in principal as a method of negotiation.

5) Certain aspects are not so transformed. So in Jorasanko in Calcutta in 1921 when they met and Andrews was also present, Tagore said to Gandhi *poems I can spin Gandhiji! Songs and plays I can spin, but of your precious cotton what a mess I would make (Dutta and Robinson 1995)*. And Tagore could not really change his stance on the charkha till the end. And yet the conversation continued. The important point was that both could in all humility accept that the opinion of the other was an opinion in disagreement, which was as important to the other as to oneself.

Thus Gandhian Ahimsa and Satya make up elements in a moral epistemology where a genuine knowing of the other, by transcending narrow ego dictated perspectives, is actualised using love as a positive form of ahimsa. Love as a value concept is never learnt at one time. On the other hand knowledge of it deepens over time and through the act of conversation. Thereby the whole process uses elements of value to actually aid a genuine impartial knowing of the other without ego dictated obscurations. Once there is a genuine impartial knowing act the other is recognised as a human possibility with a view that has as much moral right to be his view, as ours has to be our view. This facilitates a mutual acceptance of disagreement.

6) The acceptance itself is accompanied by mutual affection love and respect that has grown out of the conversation. This makes up a new ethics of argumentation along Gandhian lines.

The art of conversation, as used by Gandhi, was practical ahimsa as not merely non-injury but positive good feeling, which grew into affectionate regard and love. This art, which Gandhi exemplified all through his life, is a powerful method of conflict resolution. It is however, almost entirely missed by analysts who make historical examinations of Gandhian satyagrahas. The present case study shows how Gandhi dissolved conflicts with a practical ethics of disagreement. Wherein, the conflict was dissolved not necessarily by agreement but by entering a conversation that grew into a comfortable acceptance even of disagreement.

In the next section I want to look at how Gandhian ethics went even beyond this and learnt to dissolve conflicts with an ethics of irreconcilable differences. For this I will undertake another case study of Gandhi and his conversations with a man with whom he had irreconcilable differences of the most disturbing and provoking kind. That man was Vinayak Damodar Savarkar.

Section II

Therefore, Ye, O Hindus consolidate and Strengthen Hindu nationality, not to give wanton offence to any of our non-Hindu compatriots in fact to any one in the world but in just and urgent self-defence of our race and land, to render it impossible for others to betray her or to subject her to unprovoked attacks by any of those pan-isms that are struggling from continent to continent. (Savarkar as quoted in Veer Savarkar by D.Keer)

And when justice uses these terrible means for her salvation, the blame of it does not lie, on justice but on the preceding cruel injustice the power and insolence of which called forth the means. We do not hold the justice, which gives the death sentence responsible for bloodshed, but rather the injustice, which is taken to the gallows. (V.D. Savarkar in The Indian War of Independence)

Do you not tremble to think of freeing India by assassination? What we need to do is kill ourselves. It is a cowardly thought that of killing others. Those who will rise to power by murders will certainly not make India happy. (M.K Gandhi as quoted in, M.K Gandhi, Hind Swaraj and Other Writings, by Anthony J.Parel)

Your belief that there is no connection between the means and the ends is a great mistake. Through that mistake even men who have been considered religious have committed grievous crimes. (M.K Gandhi as quoted in M.K Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings* by Anthony J.Parel)

The readings above are symptomatic of a most powerful contrast of vision between Gandhi and Savarkar. Surely no conflict could have a greater provocation. And yet Gandhi tried to converse with Savarkar. He did this in person and through the *Hind Swaraj* and this conversation blunted the edge of his disagreements to lead to a practical ethics of irreconcilable difference where hardened stances could not allow for friendship or love but Gandhi's ahimsa prevailed as a respect of difference. I will trace the conversation to examine how Gandhi actualised his ahimsa even under the greatest provocation to make for the blunting of a conflict that could have been bitter and hate generating.

Gandhi's Acquaintance with Savarkar, probably started in 1906 when Savarkar went to London on a scholarship from Shyamji Krishna Varma. Around the same time, that is, in October 1906 Gandhi and Haji Ojer Ally were in London on a second deputation from South Africa. Arriving in London from South Africa Gandhi and Ally were taken by Leius Ritch to India house. The very next morning they met the Indians staying at India house. It is quite possible that Gandhi met Savarkar for the first time on this occasion though there is no historical evidence of the meeting. He could definitely have met him during this period as he met with Shyamji Krishna Varma for discussions. The second meeting for which there is historical evidence was in 1909

when Gandhi was again on a deputation from South Africa. This was immediately after the assassination of Sir Curzon Willie on July 1st, 1909, by Madanlal Dhingra. Both Gandhi and Savarkar were present at a Dussehra dinner in Bayswater at Nazimuddin's Indian restaurant to debate on what India was and ought to become. The meeting marked a clash between them. Both used religious-cultural metaphors and invoked the hero of the Ramayana, Rama. However, for Gandhi Rama was the embodiment of self-suffering and sacrifice whereas for Savarkar he established righteousness but only after slaying Ravana. A police agent reporting the meeting recorded *24th October M.K.Gandhi of Transvaal presided in the dinner party and expressed disagreement with Savarkar. So he was criticized by Chatto and Savarkar.* Gandhi and Savarkar were both in Yeravda Jail in 1922. In 1927 Savarkar was in Ratnagiri. On 1st March, at a public address, Gandhi referred to him as a person he had known well in England and whose sacrifice and patriotism were well known. Savarkar invited Gandhi to his residence and this was their first meeting after nearly 18 years i.e. after London. They discussed political problems and the problem of shudhi. Neither was convinced by the other party. This was their last meeting.

Gandhi and Savarkar stood for powerfully different and polarised visions of Indian identity, Nationalism and Hinduism. The relationship between Gandhi's conception of Hinduism and the Indian self and Savarkar's Hindu rashtra and Hindutva was adversarial both conceptually and politically. Savarkar stood strongly against the Gandhian reading of ancient Hindu texts and consequent understanding of Hinduism as revolving around Ahimsa, Satya and God. Further he did not agree with Gandhi's construction of a synthetic Indian identity or with the Gandhian political programme. However, Gandhi tried to apply his practical ahimsa and converse with the man and ideology that disturbed him even more strongly than the British presence in India. Simply because it was so completely opposed to everything that Gandhi believed about Hinduism and about non-violence.

Further the ideology concerned had complete epistemic confidence in the fact that it was fighting for justice and was the voice of the Hindu religion and philosophy. In fact, from the hindutva perspective, all moral and religious authority rested solely with itself. Gandhi wrote the Hind Swaraj on the voyage from London to South Africa between 13 and 22 November 1909 on board the ship Kildonan Castle. He himself made it clear in the preface to the book that it was intended to address the Indian school of violence that he had encountered in London and South Africa.

My countrymen, therefore, believe that they should adopt modern civilisation and modern methods of violence to drive out the English, Hind Swaraj has been written in order to show that they were following a suicidal policy, and if they would but revert to their once glorious civilisation, either the English would adopt the latter and become Indianised or find their occupation of India gone.

The impact of the encounter with Savarkar and his strong ideas of militant nationalism are also seen in the letter Gandhi wrote just before leaving London to Lord Ampthill (20th October, 1909)

Opposed as I am to violence in any shape or form, I have endeavoured specially to come into contact with the so-called extremists who may be better described as the party of violence.

Gandhi's special effort to come into contact with the party of violence was of course to talk and resolve the conflicting viewpoints with ahimsa and love. Yet the stance of Savarkar was completely opposed to such an exchange and conversation. As it was constitutive of his ideology to have an epistemic confidence with complete and total disregard for other ways of being. Witness the statement from Savarkar above; *And when Justice uses these terrible means for her salvation the blame of it does not lie, on justice but on the preceding cruel injustice....*

Yet Gandhi attempted to converse with Savarkar and the party of violence through the Hind Swaraj and in person when, in London. The main thrust of the conversation was of course to blunt the conflict. Through the conversation thus started, Gandhi also tried to demonstrate that the complete appropriation of Hinduism and the Hindu tradition and cultural metaphors by the party of violence, could be subjected to an internal criticism from within Hinduism as the self same texts could also be read as advocating self-sacrifice and ahimsa.

Gandhi's stance against a militant position was primarily, a moral one. That argument pointed out that the militant unquestioning adoption of the just and moral stance was problematic in its complete disregard for genuine non-ego centered understanding of the other. Further the militants were attempting to reach political freedom that would not constitute swaraj. Thus Gandhi said in the Hind Swaraj, *It is swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves.* Another problem with Savarkar's adoption of the moral stance in relation to hindutva was that it made an assumption that the moral life could survive as a fragmented reality. Thus in the position adopted there was a clear notion that moral ideals are good as utopian goals while ground realities dictated practical and frequently militant measures. Savarkar it could be said missed the strong characterization of the moral life as permeated by a sense of dynamic unity. Gandhi tried to make the latter point very strongly in Hind swaraj where he said; *The means may be likened to a seed, the end to a tree and there is the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree.*

To now take the above as a case study and try to build a Gandhian ethics of practical ahimsa using the art of conversation even where the adversary is completely and totally in violent opposition to oneself;

1) In step one Gandhi tried to specially come into contact with the party of violence, as he was very opposed to their methods and ideology. Therefore the person with whom one is in conflict, no matter how opposed to oneself in nature or in ideology, must not be ignored or avoided. The person should be specially sought out in order to begin the conversation. This was perhaps because Gandhi combined a belief in an absolute truth with a strong realization that human beings could still be mistaken in their search for the little truths. Being fallible, they saw truth in fragments and could make mistakes. Consequently, truths about human lives and human viewpoints could lie somewhere between viewpoints in the middle of a conversation. That this awareness was an integral part of Gandhian philosophy meant that Gandhi's conversations could always look for the truth somewhere in between and there was no one side which was completely in possession of such truth.

2) On being in a sharply opposed conflict with Savarkar at the Dussehra dinner at bayswater in London, where he was criticised by Savarkar, Gandhi continued his conversation, trying to put

forward his view, in Hind Swaraj. He gave full thought to the opposed opinion and used deliberately the style of conversation to hold such a conversation with Savarkar and others belonging to the party of violence, even in absense. Thus it was that a Gandhian ethics of conversation could be carried out without the other party through writing and letters, and as in, the Hind Swaraj. The point was not to give up attempts to engage with the adversary. This, if it could not effect any change of view, would at the very least, blunt the edge of the conflict. This called for the moral and intellectual exercise of virtues like patience with those completely opposed to oneself, courage to enter a conversation with those who were not interested in being thus engaged with oneself, humility to appreciate that the other party had a view however much opposed to one's own. Thus even in the Hind Swaraj Gandhi tried to appreciate the point of view of those like Savarkar, when in the conversation in absense, he replied to the Reader, (recognising that Dhingra whose methods he himself was so opposed to was a patriot), *those who believe that India has gained by Dhingra's act and such other acts in India make a serious mistake. Dhingra was a patriot but his love was blind. He gave his body in a wrong way; its ultimate result can only be mischievous.* (Chapter 15, How can India become Free? *Hind Swaraj*)

3) Despite Savarkar's continued hardened non-negotiable stance the conversation continued down the years when Gandhi called him a true patriot at a public meeting and visited him at Pune. Gandhi on that visit even asked him humorously that he hoped that Savarkar did not mind his habit of making experiments. Savarkar replied *you know the story of the boys and the frogs. You will be making the experiment at the cost of the nation.*

4) Here beyond the art of conversation when communication becomes difficult due to the incommensurability and hardening of stance diametrically and ethically opposed to each other, Gandhi could still use the art of conversation to try and genuinely attempt to appreciate the other on his own individual terms and, in the context of, his own ethical framework. Therefore he could appreciate and acclaim Savarkar as a true patriot even besides and alongside Savarkar's severest Critique of himself. For Ahimsa and the art of conversation, even where seriously impaired, by being largely one sided, could still blunt the edge of the conflict by blunting at least the one side. This much is still enough when we look at the terrible horrors which result when both sides give their all to perpetuate conflict and bitterness.

5) Thus beyond the ethics of listening and conversing the art of conversation could lead to a practical ethics of irreconcilable differences. Where no matter how difficult the conflict, self-transcendence and ahimsa could posit a genuine understanding of the opponent from within his own conceptual and ethical scheme. Gandhi's ability to laugh both at himself, and, at life, aided his development of such an ethics of disagreement. For the ability to laugh at oneself is an important part of the moral exercise of the control of the ego.

Examining the relationships and conversations above it becomes clear that a Gandhian practical ahimsa and the art of conversation was essentially a tool of conflict dissolution rather than conflict resolution. Resolution has the sense of resolving difference through arduous negotiation and bartering of views and advantages. Whereas in Gandhi the point was to dissolve antagonism with love, so that the art of conversation, committed, as it was to reaching truth through the talk itself, deepened love and regard till the differences could well remain, as antagonism would disperse. This happened even with Gandhi and Savarkar for Gandhi did not bear antagonism

towards Savarkar even trying to make jokes with him till the very end of their encounter and conversation. So though largely one sided, the conflict could not be sustained as a conflict, since there was no antagonism from at least one side. Conflict requires two parties, at the very least, and both antagonistic to each other. With one alone there is no conflict possible. The Gandhian art of conversation seems to have been based on certain moral assumptions like a commitment to searching for truths that inform life and action. A commitment to ahimsa as non-violence and good feeling and finally love of all. The art of conversation called forth intellectual and moral virtues. The parties to such conversations indeed would grow in such qualities through the act of conversation itself. Further the art of Gandhian ahimsa and conversation did not seem to be based on any explicit religious commitment. Certainly faith in a religious absolute might serve to strengthen the commitment to truth and the virtues. However, the point is that the art of conversation could proceed without any explicit appeal to specific ethico religious categories like Dharma, on a purely ethical basis .It could indeed be said to work on the basis of faith in humanity and human goodness if such faith could be sustained without a belief in God.