

## GANDHI: NON-VIOLENCE AND PRAGMATISM

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This paper seeks to explore Gandhi's concept of non-violence which had been originally given shape in *Hind Swaraj* and from which Gandhi can be said to have not deviated till the last day of his life, barring perhaps one exception, (and to a lesser extent another) which however could be read in accordance to what he had theorised in *Hind Swaraj*. The statement of his ideas occasionally invited critical comment perhaps none more so than when he advised Jews living in Germany to offer non violent resistance in the face of Nazi persecution. This paper will focus on the significant aspects that can be culled over from this episode.

This episode is significant for a number of reasons. The Holocaust constitutes one of the most horrific chapters of human history and Gandhi's suggestion that the Jews offer their lives to awaken world opinion was greeted in most quarters with incredulity and derision. This episode embodies to a great degree not only the question of the ultimate validity of Gandhian non-violence but it also holds within itself the contours of the debate as to whether non violent protest can succeed against despotic regimes and therefore, provides an opportunity to examine its relevance for our times.

Is non-violence endowed with an abiding intrinsic validity existent only on its own set of conditions on the plane of praxis, or is it perpetually dependent upon its other – to whom it is directed? Is the source of its validity intrinsic or

will it forever lie in a set of extraneous factors? These will be the questions that this paper will try to look into.

It was 'not without hesitation' that Gandhi ventured to offer his views on the 'Arab-Jew question in Palestine' and on the 'persecution of Jews in Germany' through an article written in the *Harijan* on 26<sup>th</sup> November 1938, in response to letters that he had been receiving which solicited his opinion on these issues. It would be relevant to quote in some detail, from his response:

My sympathies are all with Jews. I have known them intimately in South Africa. Some of them became life long companions. Through these friends I came to learn much of their age long persecution. They have been the Untouchables of Christianity. The parallel between their treatment by Christians and the treatment of untouchables by Hindus is very close. Religious sanction has been invoked in both cases for the justification of the inhuman treatment meted out to them. Apart from the friendships, therefore, there is the more common universal reason for my sympathy for the Jews.<sup>1</sup>

He then stated that his sympathy for them was however tempered with the untenability of the demand for a Jewish homeland and that he wished that the Jews should make their native lands their home. To restore Palestine 'partly or wholly' to the Jews would be a 'crime against humanity' as it would reduce the Arabs who had lived there for centuries. Gandhi's remark on the persecution of Jews, as we shall see, reflects on larger philosophical and moral questions. Since the responses to Gandhi's statement are generally quoted in greater detail than as to what Gandhi actually stated, I would prefer to place before you his statement in substantial measure rather than summarize it. He said:

The nobler cause would be to insist on a just treatment of the Jews wherever they are born and bred. The Jews born in France are French in precisely the same sense that Christians born in France are French. If the Jews have no home but Palestine, will

they relish the idea of being forced to leave the other parts of the world in which they are settled? Or do they want a double home where they remain at will? This cry for the national home affords a colourable justification for the German expulsion of Jews. But the German persecution of the Jews seems to have no parallel in history. The tyrants of old never went so mad as Hitler seems to have gone. And he is doing it with religious zeal. For, he is propounding a new religion of exclusive and militant nationalism in the name of which any inhumanity becomes an act of humanity to be rewarded here and hereafter. The crime of an obviously mad but intrepid youth is being visited upon this whole race with unbelievable ferocity. If there ever could be a justifiable war in the name of humanity, a war against Germany, to prevent the wanton persecution of a whole race, would be completely justified. But I do not believe in any war. A discussion of the pros and cons of such a war is, therefore, outside my horizon or province. Germany is showing to the world how efficiently violence can be worked when it is not hampered by any hypocrisy or weakness masquerading as humanitarianism. It is also showing how hideous, terrible and terrifying it looks in its nakedness.

Can the Jews resist this organized and shameless persecution? Is there a way to preserve their self-respect and not to feel helpless, neglected and forlorn? I submit there is. If I were a Jew and were born in Germany and earned my livelihood there, I would claim Germany as my home even as the tallest gentile German might, and challenge him to shoot me or cast me in the dungeon; I would refuse to be expelled or to submit to discriminating treatment. And for doing this I should not wait for the fellow Jews to join me in civil resistance, but would have confidence that in the end the rest were bound to follow my example. If one Jew or all the Jews were to accept the prescription here offered, he or they cannot be worse off than now. And suffering voluntarily undergone will bring them an inner strength and joy which no number of resolutions of sympathy passed in the world outside Germany can. Indeed, even if Britain, France and America were to declare hostilities against Germany, they can bring no inner joy, no inner strength. The calculated violence of Hitler may even result in a general massacre of the Jews by way of his first answer to the declaration of such hostilities. But if the Jewish

mind could be prepared for voluntary suffering, even the massacre I have imagined could be turned into a day of thanksgiving and joy that Jehovah had wrought deliverance of the race even at the hands of the tyrant.<sup>2</sup>

Gandhi went on to say that Satyagraha in South Africa had been practiced by a 'handful of Indians' who attracted no sympathy to their cause from any quarter, and 'world opinion and the Indian Government came to their aid after eight years of fighting'. The Jews in Germany were 'far more gifted' than the Indians in South Africa, and were a compact, homogeneous community, and therefore 'infinitely' better placed to offer Satyagraha. Were they to turn to non violent resistance, they would be able to turn a 'degrading manhunt' into a calm and determined stand against the 'godless fury of dehumanized man'. They would be able to render 'service to fellow-Germans' and to 'prove their title to be the real Germans as against those who are today dragging, however unknowingly, the German name into the mire'.<sup>3</sup>

This statement aroused a storm of controversy, not only among Jews around the world, but among non Jewish Germans also. The Germans alleged that Gandhi had indulged in slander against their nation, while Jew opinion expressed outrage and anguish at Gandhi's ignorance of the situation, and his insensitivity to the horrors that the Jews in Nazi Germany were experiencing. In an agonized response written on 24 February, 1939 from Jerusalem, Martin Buber, confessed to 'having been very slow in writing this letter to you, Mahatma... to have made repeated pauses — sometimes days elapsing between short paragraphs — in order to test my knowledge and my way of thinking.... searching whether I had not in any one point over stepped the measure of self-preservation allotted and even prescribed by God to a human community and whether I had not fallen into the grievous error of collective egoism'.<sup>4</sup> Recollecting the 'many instances of genuine Satyagraha' he had seen among Jews, where 'force nor cunning was used to escape



the consequences of their behaviour', but which 'apparently exerted not the slightest influence on their opponents', Buber stated that non-violence may harbour the hope of gradually bringing unfeeling human beings to their senses, but a 'diabolic universal steam-roller cannot thus be withstood':

There is a certain situation in which from the 'Satyagraha' of the strength of the spirit no 'Satyagraha' of the power of truth can result. 'Satyagraha' means testimony. Testimony without acknowledgement, ineffective, unobserved martyrdom, a martyrdom cast to the winds — that is the fate of innumerable Jews in Germany. God alone accepts their testimony, and God 'seals' it, as is said in our prayers. But no maxim for suitable behaviour can be deduced there from. Such martyrdom is a deed — but who would venture to demand it.<sup>5</sup>

Another prominent critic of Gandhi's stand, Judah L. Magnes thought that the possibility of Jews offering 'civil resistance' in Germany did not exist as the protagonists of such action were either killed or sent to concentration camps in the 'dead of night', without 'even a ripple' being produced on the 'surface of German life', in contrast to Gandhi's actions like the salt march, 'when the whole world is permitted to hang upon your words and be witness to your acts'.<sup>6</sup>

Many of the analyses of this subject appear to concur with the view that with his statements on the Holocaust Gandhi discredited his own position. Joan Bondurant, to whom we shall return later, is arguably the major exception, who argues in favour of Gandhi's stand, but her analysis confines itself to the general principle of struggle against totalitarian systems, without going into the specifics of the case at hand. Dennis Dalton, one of the few scholars who have examined this episode in a slightly more detailed fashion, wondered: 'Where is his compassionate understanding for the oppressed or even a hint of practical programme of action? He seemed unable at this time to

grasp the enormity of the Holocaust. Yet the differences between Nazi Germany and British India were evident then as now.<sup>7</sup> However it is rather puzzling to find Dalton's counter assertion in the relevant end note that 'Gandhi was unusually well informed during the 1930s and 1940s about the plight of Jews in Europe in the face of Nazi persecution'.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps the sheer inhumanity of the Nazi state has understandably obscured the nuances of Gandhi's position regarding non violent resistance to Hitler's regime. Unfortunately it has in the process threatened to dilute the potential of the ideas that are encapsulated in the debate which is still carried on different planes, between different interlocutors over the times.

In a study unallied to Gandhi and the Jews, Hannah Arendt famously stated:

In a head-on clash between violence and power, the outcome is hardly in doubt. If Gandhi's enormously powerful and successful strategy of non violent resistance had met with a different enemy – Stalin's Russia, Hitler's Germany, even pre-war Japan, instead of England—the outcome would not have been decolonization, but massacre and submission. However, England in India and France in Algeria had good reasons for their restraint. Rule by sheer violence comes into play where power is being lost...<sup>9</sup>

She went on to say that power and violence were opposites, 'where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent', and that unchecked violence ensures the disappearance of its power. Strangely she is led to the conclusion that: 'This implies that it is not correct to think of the opposite of violence as non-violence; to speak of non violent power is actually redundant'.<sup>10</sup> But the statement that can be said to emerge from her study is that violence will hardly be 'effective with respect to the relatively long term objective of structural change'<sup>11</sup> and that 'much of the present glorification of violence is caused by severe frustration of the faculty of action in the modern world.'<sup>12</sup>

Gandhi was in fact trying to revitalize the faculty of action among Indians through his movements in India and suggested the same to Jews in Germany. However in a study on Gandhi, while discussing 'Hitler, Jews, Palestine', Rajmohan Gandhi writes:

There is no way of knowing how, if born a Jew in Germany, Gandhi would have organized non violent resistance there. In him we have seen a calling to present non-violence joined by strong pragmatism. He never asked Indians to invite a massacre from the British, or Hindus, Muslims or 'Untouchables' to invite a massacre from their Indian foes. The real commander of a non violent battle was very different from the professor of a remorseless non violent ethic.<sup>13</sup>

This statement is extremely significant, because unlike most of the other statements on this issue, it has perhaps inadvertently let in a suggestion of uncertainty into Gandhi stand, and put to question Gandhi's repeated assertion made right from the days of writing *Hind Swaraj*, till the last day of his life, that presented with an irremediably unjust situation he would opt for non violent protest, irrespective of the cost such a course of action entailed. Rajmohan Gandhi's statement seems to imply that in extreme cases, even with Gandhi, the pragmatic could become opposed to the ethical. I would like to argue, that Gandhi's position on the issue of Jews in Nazi Germany, illuminates the point, that Gandhi's pragmatism is a different pragmatism: it is the ethical as pragmatic, an unshakeable conviction that the ethical was the pragmatic.

To explain the 'why' and the 'how' of this premise let us go back to our different interlocutors, and in due course contemplate on the two different scenarios that may seem to emerge from this debate.

For a few months after his initial statement of November 1938, Gandhi was engaged in a written dialogue with people who responded to his suggestion. His responses to them through the pages of the *Harijan* clarify his stand. Apparently

he never received the letters from Buber and Magnes and so never came to reply to them. In his first reply, to his German critics, he refuted the allegation that as he was ignorant about the real situation his intervention was misinformed and inaccurate. Admitting his 'ignorance about European politics', he spoke of the 'main facts about the atrocities' being 'beyond dispute'. He stated that non-violence was a sovereign remedy, and that 'to commend my prescription to the Jews for the removal of their many ills, I did not need to have an accurate knowledge of European politics'. He wondered whether his 'remedy was after all not so indecorous as it may appear, but that it was eminently practical if only the beauty of suffering without retaliation was realized'.<sup>14</sup>

His subsequent statement is a cogent exposition of the ethical as pragmatic:

To say that my writing has rendered neither myself, my movement, nor German-Indian relations any service, is surely irrelevant, if not also unworthy, implying as it does a threat; and I should rank myself a coward if, for fear of my country or myself or Indo-German relations being harmed, I hesitated to give what I felt in the innermost recess of my heart to be cent per cent sound advice.<sup>15</sup>

It would be interesting to contrast this with what his disciple, Nehru, was to say on the Tibetan issue while replying to a non-official resolution that India should take the Tibetan issue to the United Nations, moved in the Lok Sabha on September 4, 1959. He mentioned that his government's approach was governed mainly by 'sympathy for the Tibetan people', and the 'desire to maintain friendly relations with China', and that the 'slight contradiction' between the two was the 'difficulty of the situation'. Any step therefore could not be taken 'in a huff, regardless of the consequences', as it was 'essential', that India and China 'should have friendly and as far as possible, cooperative relations'. His summing up of the situation was in a sense a classic display of diplomacy:



Looking at it from this point of view, the United Nations may come into the picture for two reasons: one, violation of human rights and two, aggression. Now, violation of human rights applies to those who have accepted the charter of the United Nations; in other words, the members of the United Nations. You cannot apply the charter to people who have not accepted the charter, who have not been allowed to come into the United Nations.

Secondly, if you talk about aggression by one sovereign independent state on another, as I told you, in so far as world affairs are concerned, Tibet had not been acknowledged as an independent state for a considerable time. Suppose we get over the legal quibbles and legal difficulties. What good will it achieve? It may lead to a debate in the General assembly or the Security Council which will be after the fashion of the cold war. Having had the debate what will the promoters of the motion do? Nothing more. They will return home. Obviously, nobody is going to send an army to Tibet and China, for that was not done in the case of Hungary which is a part of Europe and which is more allied to European nations. It is fantastic to think they will move in that way in Tibet.

All that will happen is an expression of strong opinion by some and denials by others. The matter will be raised to the level of the cold war and will probably produce reactions on the Chinese Government which will be more adverse to Tibet and the Tibetan people than even now.<sup>16</sup>

It hardly needs to be pointed out that there is no mention of the moral issues at stake: the suppression of the voice of a people and of the need to protest against such repression. We witness in these lines the pragmatism of the state, where the pragmatic is opposed to the ethical. One wonders what Gandhi would have said to Nehru or perhaps one need not; one can perhaps accurately conjecture what he would have said to Nehru and to the Dalai Lama. It is said that when Gandhi was proposing non violent resistance to the Jews he was unaware that Hitler in November 1937 had offered a

simple suggestion regarding the Indian political movement to Lord Halifax: 'All you have to do is to shoot Gandhi. If necessary, shoot more leaders of Congress. You will be surprised how quickly the trouble will die down'.<sup>17</sup> Elsewhere it is narrated as to how Hitler had similarly remarked in January 1942, 'If we took India, the Indians would certainly not be enthusiastic, and they'd not be slow to regret the good old days of English rule'.<sup>18</sup> On another occasion Goebbels is said to have called Gandhi 'a fool whose policies (of 'passive resistance') seem merely calculated to drag India further and further into misfortune'.<sup>19</sup>

Gandhi would have been hardly disconcerted by the prospects of his likely reception in Germany. In one of his responses on this issue, he drew a distinction between the 'passive resistance of the weak and active non violent resistance of the strong', which 'can and does work in the teeth of the fiercest opposition'. He clarified that by advising non violent resistance against Nazi persecution he had not logically advised the 'democratic powers' to refrain from action, on the contrary he expected them to come to the rescue of the Jews since they were duty bound to do so. He however was convinced that any such help would be largely ineffective and the Jews would have to fashion their own resistance, for which he felt his prescription to be infallible when taken recourse to in the correct manner. Gandhi also acknowledged the criticism that he had not been able to gain universal acceptance for his remedy even within India, where he was the 'self appointed General' and where non-violence had not been imbibed in its proper spirit. But he said that it would be unethical on his part to refrain from advising non-violence to situations which required it, and he believed without doubt that it would be effective in Germany where it was sorely needed. Moreover he counted himself among the blessed, who expected nothing from others, at least in the realm of non violent movements.

There is a striking similarity in the conditions which

engendered the writing of *Hind Swaraj* and his statement on Jews. Although *Hind Swaraj* contains the much more elaborate treatment of non-violence, his statement to the Jews dramatically introduced the concept of non-violence in the western world in general, whose ethos he deemed to be broadly antithetical to the concept and its practice, and in Germany in particular, which had the most adverse conditions imaginable for the practice of non violent resistance. The similarity of origin between *Hind Swaraj* and his statement of 1938 lies in the apprehension of violence being acknowledged as the viable expression of protest under inhospitable conditions. *Hind Swaraj* was the rebuttal of the ideas of the school of violence within the Indian freedom movement, demonstrated in the assassination of Curzon-Wyllie by Madan Lal Dhingra. It is highly significant that Gandhi understood the undercurrent of violence in the Jewish psyche of the 1930s which led to the predominance of David Ben Gurion over Chaim Weizmann in the Zionist movement, and which has come to represent a major stream of thought in modern Israel. It is another matter that the Jews were helpless before Nazi persecution, indeed their very passivity could be said to have been channelized later into the violent assertion that we witness today. The greater meaning, in human terms, of their suffering, appears to have been lost on many of them. Even before Nazi persecution began a strong Jewish opinion had begun to build up against the 'assimilationists', those Jews who favoured assimilation in their native culture, as it was felt that they were diluting the movement for a separate Jewish homeland by emphasizing that the 'fight against anti-Semitism' was the need of the hour rather than the assertion of a separate exclusive identity. A pro-Zionist attitude had characterized the first stages of the Jewish policy of the National Socialists. The polemical Jewish slogan 'Wear it with pride, the yellow star', given in response to the Boycott Day of April 1, 1933 was also directed at the assimilationists among themselves,

who it was said, 'were always behind the times'. It was only six years later that the Nazi's would actually compel the Jews to wear the Star of David as a mark of inferiority. It is also the psyche of the militant Jews that we speak of today, it is widely known that the diabolical Nazi machine would have embarked on its course anyway. However the degree of its success would have to depend also on the state of the Jewish mind, as in turn it would be the state of the Jewish mind on which would depend the subsequent course of Jewish, and to a great extent, world history. Robert Weltsch, who had coined the slogan in 1933, was to say later that he 'would never have issued his slogan if he had been able to foresee developments'.<sup>20</sup> In October 1938 Zindel Grynszpan, a German Jew of Polish descent, along with thousands like him was brutally evicted from Germany. On November 7, 1938 his seventeen year old son Herschel Grynszpan, living in Paris, shot and killed a young German diplomat posted in Paris, named Ernst Vom Rath. The assassination was the immediate provocation for the 'Kristallnacht' or the 'night of the broken glass' of November 9, when 'seventy five hundred Jewish shop windows were broken, all synagogues went up in flames, and twenty thousand Jewish men were taken off to concentration camps.'<sup>21</sup>

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of November Gandhi wrote his first statement on the issue of Jewish persecution, referring to Herschel Grynszpan as an 'obviously mad, but intrepid youth'. However Gandhi's prescription of an altogether different intrepidity for the Jews continues to be misunderstood with the resultant denial of its relevance in human history. Gandhi accepted the probability expressed by one of his correspondents, that 'a Jewish Gandhi in Germany, should one arise, would "function" for about five minutes - until the first Gestapo agent would lead him, not to a concentration camp, but directly to the Guillotine.'<sup>22</sup> But for him that did not disprove the 'efficacy of Ahimsa'. He could imagine the suffering and death of many more in such a course of action:

'Sufferers need not see the result during their lifetimes. They must have faith that, if their cult survives, the result is certainty. The method of violence gives no greater guarantee than that of non-violence.'<sup>23</sup>

What would have happened if his advice had been followed?

Scenario 1. There is unified non violent resistance movement by Jews in Germany in which they come out openly against the decree of wearing the Yellow Star, refuse to leave Germany when given expulsion orders, refuse to report when served summons from the Gestapo offices. There are public demonstrations all over Germany, as in 1938 World War II had not commenced, and Nazi's are in control only in Germany and Austria. Jews in the rest of Europe and America begin protests against the Nazi regime.

Hitler diverts the war machine he had been assembling for the future war, from preparing for a state of war readiness, against the Jews. Most of them are mercilessly killed, and the survivors taken to concentration camps, as extermination camps have not begun operating, where they also die. Most of these operations against the Jews are public knowledge, as the world press still has access to public events in Germany since Hitler is still negotiating with the major European powers and war time restrictions are not in place, as it is not yet war time in 1938. However there is no effect on German public opinion. The major powers ignore this massacre, or pass resolutions against it, all the while engaging diplomatically with Hitler to further goals and aims of real politic. Hitler goes ahead with his plans of aggrandizement. The world war takes place with more or less the same results. The Jews are almost decimated. Only the comment of Gandhi regarding the resistance/ Holocaust would have changed. Or would it?

But the above mentioned scenario seems rather implausible, simply because too many imponderables are involved. Such global quietude in the face of a resistance



and its reprisals seems inconceivable. Acknowledging that the Holocaust was the 'Greatest crime of our time', Gandhi reiterated in 1946 what he had said in 1938, that a Jewish resistance would definitely have had other consequences than those which occurred without such a movement: 'They should have thrown themselves into the sea from cliffs. It would have aroused the world and the people of Germany.... As it is they succumbed anyway in their millions.'<sup>24</sup> A section of opinion still holds this statement to be typical of Gandhi's lack of sensitivity and understanding of the Holocaust, where he offered prescription without offering a practical programme.<sup>25</sup> But it is a fact that Gandhi's contemporary interlocutors on this issue did not ask for practical suggestions. They were simply incensed that he had linked Nazi persecution with the Jew-Arab dispute in Palestine. They normally stated the fact that non violent resistance was simply not possible in Nazi Germany, and Gandhi's unflinching stand that it was, never provoked them to ask of him as to how precisely could it be organised. They stopped with censuring him. There was no effort to explore the moral issues Gandhi had raised: individual responsibility to protest against inhuman regimes; the preparation of the self for undertaking such a protest; that passivity before oppression was doubly unethical in as much as it violated the principle of individual responsibility and frequently if not always, allowed passivity to depict itself as non-violence.

Hayem Greenburg's allegation, made out in his detailed letter to Gandhi, that Gandhi had been misled because of his proclivity for Muslim appeasement, is cited in detail in most studies, but the infinitely more significant portion of his letter is not so often quoted. It is another matter that Greenburg did not recognise that appeasement is built into pragmatism of a kind which was entirely alien to Gandhi, and which would make appeasement of a person or a principle impossible for him. However it was perhaps only Greenburg of all the distinguished correspondents of

Gandhi on this issue, who understood and acknowledged the subtle point which Gandhi had made on the virtue of Non-violence, more clearly in a subsequent statement on the debate:

I hold that non-violence is not merely a personal virtue. It is also a social virtue to be cultivated like the other virtues. Surely society is largely regulated by the expression of non-violence in its mutual dealings. What I ask for is an extension of it on a larger, national and international scale.<sup>26</sup>

Greenburg saw no schism in Gandhi's thinking and accepted that his suggestion of non-violence was 'quite natural' and in 'complete harmony with his entire outlook', and that 'his ethical-religious convictions dictate to him the duty of heroic and active resistance', the truth of which was to Greenburg 'as self evident as a mathematical axiom'. Noting at the same time that Gandhi had since the years advocated Satyagraha as a 'universal ideal which could be applied by all the oppressed and injured everywhere and independent of the specific historical situation', and that it had 'proved to be practical and effective'; Greenburg expressed his doubts as to whether Satyagraha would succeed among the Jews of Germany, not only because of the adverse situation in Nazi Germany but much more so because the German Jews were psychologically not equipped for such a movement given that it was not in keeping with the ethos and character of the western world:

But I admit to myself that in order to apply Gandhi's method of struggle it is necessary to accept it not only on a purely intellectual plane; it is also imperative that it be assimilated emotionally, that it should be believed in with all the force of one's being. Such faith the Jews of Germany do not possess. Faith in the principle of Satyagraha is a matter of special predisposition which, for numerous reasons, the German Jews have not developed. The civilization in which German Jews have lived for so many generations, and to the creation of which they have so energetically and ably contributed, has not prepared them for

the "pathos" of Satyagraha. They cannot resort to passive resistance because they lack the heroism, the faith and the specific imaginative powers which alone can stimulate such heroism.<sup>27</sup>

Greenburg's analysis of ahimsa as being antithetical with the predominant ethos of the western world came quite close to what Gandhi had himself said in *Hind Swaraj*.

But Greenburg's highlighting of the brutality of the Nazi regime was coupled with a hint that although the hope of a passive resistance from the German Jews could be nurtured the expectations of that hope being fulfilled would be unrealistic as it would require a change of great proportions.

This brings us to the second scenario. Could passive resistance have been successful in Germany and if so what would be the time frame in which the success or failure of such resistance can be judged? The second scenario can be envisaged through the examination of some of the major trends of the Holocaust. It would be useful to have a sense of what had actually occurred and thus to know what ought not to have happened for a non violent resistance of some magnitude to have been born in Nazi Germany itself.

Scenario 2. This scenario is recreated from Hannah Arendt's interrogation of the cast of characters in her report on the investigation of the Holocaust at the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem. Arendt's book which upset Jewish opinion, justifies Gandhi's analysis of the situation without her knowing it. This is especially noteworthy in the light of her comments, mentioned earlier, on Gandhian techniques. It also illustrates how some of Gandhi's forebodings regarding the perils of not protesting against injustice were proved accurate in the context of the Holocaust.

First, the ironical dimensions of the killing of Vom Rath by Herschel Grynszpan. Vom Rath was 'a singularly inadequate victim', who, far from being a Nazi fanatic was known for his 'openly anti-Nazi views', and was in fact being kept under surveillance by the Gestapo because of his sympathy for Jews. Grynszpan was probably a 'psychopath'

who had been unable to finish school, having been expelled in Brussels and Paris. The German government had him extradited although he was never put under trial, and it is said that that he survived the war. It was the 'paradox of Aushwitz' that Jews who had committed criminal offences were allowed to live. Gestapo encouraged a theory of homosexuality to explain Vom Rath's murder. Arendt has speculated that the story of his homosexuality might have been a fabrication by the Gestapo: 'Grynszpan might have acted as an unwilling tool of Gestapo agents in Paris, who could have wanted to kill two birds with one stone—create a pretext for pogroms in Germany and get rid of an opponent to the Nazi regime.'<sup>28</sup>

Arendt openly spoke about the collusion of some Jewish leaders with the Nazis during the Holocaust, basing her comments largely on the depositions in the court in Jerusalem, and on some highly respected investigative works such as Raul Hilberg's classic, *The Destruction of the European Jews*.<sup>29</sup> Emissaries from Palestine approached the Gestapo and the SS on their own initiative in the early stages of the Nazi regime to 'enlist help for the illegal immigration of Jews' into Palestine, which was gladly rendered. The emissaries were not interested in rescue operations:

They wanted to select 'suitable material', and their chief enemy, prior to the extermination program, was not those who made life impossible for Jews in the old countries, Germany and Austria, but those who barred access to the new homeland, that enemy was definitely Britain, not Germany.<sup>30</sup>

We may recall Gandhi's relating of the issues of militant Zionism in Palestine with that of civil resistance of Jews in Germany 1938. Some of the overzealous proponents of a Jewish Palestine had begun to operate in Nazi Germany around this time, of course without a foreknowledge of the sinister plans the Nazi's had for the future. The Zionists thought that the Jews themselves should extricate the 'best biological material' for survival away from a hostile situation.



The obsession with the 'best biological material' was common to the Nazis also. Gandhi's worst apprehensions regarding the consequences of a combination of passivity on the one hand and militant Zionism on the other, seem to be completely realized in this comment of Arendt on the activities of the Zionists in Germany: 'It was this fundamental error in judgment that eventually led to a situation in which the non-selected majority of Jews inevitably found themselves confronted with two enemies—the Nazi authorities and the Jewish authorities.'<sup>31</sup>

Gandhi had refused to believe that the 'Germans as a nation have no heart or markedly less than the other nations of the earth'. Hitler would have been forced to take cognizance of German opinion as he 'would be a spent force if he had not the backing of his people'.<sup>32</sup> An armed conflict may cause destruction, it would not cause a change in human heart, it may well serve to produce another Hitler as the last war had. Referring to the continuing incarceration of Pastor Niemoller and the other protestors against Nazi militarism, he thought actions such as theirs would, as would a protest by the Jews, never be in vain. It was a scientific principle that energy is never wasted, it is only that the mechanical forces are less abstract. Human actions resulting from a concurrence of forces albeit invisible have a similar power; the only thing required was to keep faith. Individual human responsibility was thus of utmost importance.

Joan Bondurant has doubted the power of any totalitarianism system, 'however effective in its policing', to 'prevent word-of-mouth propaganda of an idea, or even of an understanding of a technique if there had been some previous understanding of its meaning and effectiveness.' In her opinion, 'had the Jews of Germany been schooled in Satyagraha, an organized Satyagraha could have got under way'.<sup>33</sup>

The trial of Eichmann demonstrated how the mistaken notions of the leaders of the German Jews had made collaborators out of them, and how anxious the Nazis had



been to secure their collaboration to ensure the secrecy of their operations. An authoritative account of those years unambiguously states that 'without the cooperation of the victims, it would hardly had been possible for a few thousand people, most of whom moreover, worked in offices, to liquidate many hundreds of thousands of people.'<sup>34</sup> It is ironical that Arendt stated in a later work that a Gandhian movement in Germany would have resulted in massacre and submission. In her earlier report on Eichmann's trial she raised those very issues which were central to Gandhi's argument, and her documentation supports with empirical data Gandhi's claim that non-violence would have worked in Germany as Hitler would not have been able to dispense with the veil of secrecy and order needed for fulfilling his diabolical designs.

Arendt describes how 'this role of the Jewish leaders in the destruction of their own people is undoubtedly the darkest chapter of the whole dark story':

Without Jewish help in administrative and police work – the final rounding up of Jews in Berlin was, as I have mentioned, done entirely by the Jewish police – there would have been either complete chaos or an impossibly severe drain on German power.<sup>35</sup>

Arendt spoke of the absurdity of presuming either the collective guilt of the German people on an 'ad-hoc interpretation of history', or 'a kind of collective innocence of the Jewish people', and criticised the 'reluctance evident everywhere to make judgments in terms of individual moral responsibility.' Gandhi had said much the same.

The scenario that we have been discussing raises 'one of the central moral questions of all time, namely upon the nature and function of human judgment...that human beings be capable of telling right from wrong even when all they have to guide them is their own judgment, which moreover, happens to be completely at odds with what they regard as the unanimous opinion of all those around them.'<sup>36</sup>

There are indeed stray stories of individuals reclaiming

a sense of responsibility along with a moral, human space for themselves. The story of Anton Schmidt was told at the trial of Eichmann. He was a sergeant in the German Army, assigned to a patrol in Poland, who in the course of his duties came across members of the Jewish underground, whom he helped with forged papers and trucks, without taking any money. He did it for five months from October 1941 to March 1942, when he was caught and executed. Arendt wondered how 'utterly different everything would be' not only in Israel but in all of the world, 'if only more such stories could have been told'. Peter Bamm, a German Army physician had, in his account of the killings of Jews in Sevastopol, acknowledged that he and others like him knew of the extermination units but did nothing because any protestor would have summarily disappeared, as totalitarian regimes 'don't permit their opponents to die a great, dramatic martyr's death for their convictions'. 'A great many of us might have accepted such a death', he says, if only totalitarian states let them do so. Any sacrifice in anonymity would have been futile. However he had the courage to say:

This is not to say that such a sacrifice would have been morally meaningless. It would only have been practically useless. None of us had a conviction so deeply rooted that we could have taken upon ourselves a practically useless sacrifice for the sake of a higher moral meaning.<sup>37</sup>

This is obviously the kind of utilitarian ethics, where ethics dilutes its essence and loses its way into becoming a pragmatism shorn of value.

Another question which arises from the second scenario is why in the face of such odds as are characteristic of totalitarian regimes, did Gandhi continue to emphasize on the validity of suffering for one's convictions? This is contained in the obviously larger question: why is the ethical also the pragmatic? The answer lies evident in Arendt's poignant comment on Peter Bamm's reference to the futility of a sacrifice consigned to oblivion:

The holes of oblivion do not exist. Nothing human is that perfect, and there are simply too many people in the world to make oblivion possible. One man will always be left alive to tell the story. Hence, nothing can ever be "practically useless", at least, not in the long run. It would be of great practical usefulness for Germany today, not merely for her prestige abroad but for her sadly confused inner condition, if there were more such stories to be told. For the lesson of such stories is simple and within everybody's grasp. Politically speaking, it is that under conditions of terror most people will comply but some people will not, just as the lesson of the countries to which the final solution was proposed is that "it could happen" in most places but it did not happen everywhere. Humanly speaking, no more is required, and no more can reasonably be asked, for this planet to remain a place fit for human habitation.<sup>38</sup>

In arguably his last major statement on this issue made during the last months of his life, Gandhi lamented that the heartless persecution of Jews had driven them to Palestine, but it also grieved him that they sought to impose themselves on an 'unwelcome land' with the 'aid of naked terrorism', and 'American money' and 'British arms'. He hoped a universally gifted race such as theirs would 'adopt the matchless weapon of non-violence whose use their best prophets have taught and which Jesus the Jew who wore the crown of thorns bequeathed to a groaning world.' It would be a 'soothing balm to the aching world', and their case would then become the world's case.<sup>39</sup>

Sixty years of bloodshed in one of the most intractable conflicts of our times, has not brought the warring parties any closer. One wonders whether the Gandhian path of Non-Violence may not be the way forward.

#### NOTES

1. M.K. Gandhi, *Non - Violence in Peace and War*, Ahmedabad: Navjivan Publishing House, 1942, vol I, p. 170.

2. Ibid., pp. 170-172.
3. Ibid., p. 173.
4. Martin Buber "A Letter to Gandhi" cited in abridged form in *Non-Violence: A Reader in the Ethics of Action*, eds., Doris A. Hunter & Krishna Mallick, New Delhi: Gandhi Peace Foundation, 1990, p. 147.
5. Ibid., p.141.
6. Cited in Dennis Dalton, *Nonviolence in Action: Gandhi's Power*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 136.
7. Ibid., p.137.
8. Ibid., pp. 229-230 nn177, 178
9. Hannah Arendt, *On Violence*, London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1970, p. 53.
10. Ibid., p. 56.
11. Ibid., p. 80.
12. Ibid., p. 83.
13. Rajmohan Gandhi, *Mohandas: A True Story of a Man, His People and an Empire*, Delhi: Penguin Books, 2006, p.444.
14. M. K Gandhi, *Non -Violence in Peace & War*, op.cit., p.177.
15. Ibid.
16. *India's Foreign Policy: Selected Speeches of Jawaharlal Nehru, September 1946-April 1961*, New Delhi: The Publications Division, Government of India, 1983, p. 346.
17. Halifax quoted in Earl of Avon, *The Eden Memoirs*, London: Cassel, 1962, p. 516, cited in Rajmohan Gandhi, *Mohandas*, op.cit., p. 422.
18. *Hitler's Secret Conversations. 1941-1944*, New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1953, p.163, cited in Dalton, *Non -Violence in Action*, op.cit., p. 229 n176.
19. *The Goebbels Diaries. 1942-1943*, ed., and trans by Louis P. Lochner, New York: Doubleday, 1948, p.162, cited in Dalton op.cit., p. 229 n176.
20. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, New York: Penguin Books, 2006, p. 59.
21. Ibid., p. 39.
22. "Hayem Greenburg to Gandhi" in M K Gandhi, *Non-Violence in Peace and War*, op.cit., p. 464.
23. M.K. Gandhi, *Non-violence in Peace and War* op.cit., p. 219.
24. Louis Fisher, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1990, p. 447.
25. See Dalton, *Non-violence in Action*, op.cit, pp. 136-137.
26. M.K. Gandhi, *Non-violence in Peace and War*, op cit., p. 192.
27. Hayem Greenburg to Gandhi", op.cit., p. 462.
28. Arendt mentions the bizarre nature of the case, of the Nazi's slandering the victim for homosexuality and 'illicit relations' with Jewish boys, and also making him 'a martyr and victim of world Jewry.' See Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, op.cit. pp. 227-228.

29. Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Chicago: 1961. However Arendt was highly critical of some of Hilberg's later observations on the Jewish psyche, such as the 'death wish of the Jews', and the relation between them was hardly congenial.
30. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, op.cit., p. 61.
31. Ibid., p. 61.
32. M.K. Gandhi, *Non-violence in Peace & War*, op.cit., p. 191
33. Joan Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988, p. 227.
34. Robert Pendorf, *Morder und Ermordete. Eichmann and die Judenpolitik des Dritten Reiches*, Hamburg: 1961, cited in Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, op.cit., p. 117.
35. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, op.cit., p. 117.
36. Ibid., p. 295.
37. Peter Bamm, *Die Unsichtbare Flagge*, Munich, 1952, cited in Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, op.cit., p. 232.
38. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, op.cit., pp. 232-233.
39. M.K. Gandhi, *Non-Violence in Peace & War*, op.cit., vol. II, pp. 116-117.