Chapter – IV
DISCUSSION AND ASSESSMENT

The virtue of an ideal consists in its boundlessness. But although religious ideals must thus from their very nature remain unattainable by imperfect human beings, although by virtue of their boundlessness they may seem ever to recede farther and farther away from us, the nearer we go to them, still they are closer to us than our very hands and feet because we are more certain of their reality and truth than even our own physical being. This faith in ideal constitutes real life, in fact; it is men all in all.¹

This Gandhian observation signifies the importance and expanse of his ideals, whether social, political, economic or religious in man’s everyday life and activity. The attempt at integrating ‘faith in ideal’ with ‘real life’, we read in both Plato’s theoretical construction of the ideal state and in its practical consideration, as also in Gandhi’s theoretical construction and practical activism. Both Plato’s ideal of republic and Gandhi’s idea of republic are ideal constructions. Both can be viewed as visions of two thinkers of two different cultures, societies and times aiming at the restructuring of the contemporary socio–political order. Both were products of two different cultures shaping and fashioning the mind–set of these two different thinkers in an entirely different way. The demand of the cultural tradition of ancient Greece was ‘excellence in citizenship’ and ‘excellence
in ethicality’ and this cultural tradition was followed by Plato. On the other hand, in the Indian culture human progress and development signified the development of the individual as an ethico-religious entity. According to this tradition, the individual is the product of his dharma.

*Dharma* of the Indian tradition and religion of the Western tradition, are often used synonymously but they differ widely in their meaning and significance. *Dharma* is entirely prescriptive, stating the prescription of the *veda*-s. Where the prescription is not explicit, it is to be assumed that the injunctions are in the *veda*-s. It is imagined so on the basis of the authority of the ṛṣi-s Manu, Gautama, Parāśar and Bṛhaṣpati. These are known as Kalpya – *veda*-s as distinct from Pratyakṣa – *veda*-s where the prescription of the *veda*-s is explicit. *Dharma* is not necessarily a theistic concept as it refers to the *veda*-s and not God as being the ultimate authority. But can it be called secular for that matter? Perhaps not. Besides Hinduism the other religions in India also notionally and actually speak of dharma, as for example, the Baudhha religion is a non–theistic religion which derives its dharma from the authoritative text of *Vinaya Pitaka*, the Jaina religion again a non–theistic religion derives its dharma from the authoritative text of *Acārānga Sūtra*. Similarly in the Indian context we can say dharma for the theistic religions like the Parsi religion is derived from *Avestā*, for Judaism it
is derived from the *Old Testament*, for Christianity it is derived from the *New Testament*, for Islam it is derived from the *Qur-ān* and *Hadith*, and for the Sikh religion it is derived from the *Guru Granth Sāhib*. Different religions deriving *dharma* from the different authoritative texts indicate the prescriptive character of *dharma*.

*Dharma* in this sense is the ‘*dharma*’ which Gandhi practiced and professed. It is also this prescriptive character of *dharma* signifying a code of conduct which distinguishes it from the western concept of ‘religion’. *Dharma* in this sense lacks the characteristic of religious consciousness which is so typical a characteristic of western theology and philosophy of religion. *Dharma* in this sense is not merely a path leading to *mokṣa* helping one to achieve the ultimate state of salvation. The code of conduct can also be sanctioned on a social plane and thus can be transformed into a social virtue bypassing which salvation cannot be achieved. This is called his *āśrama dharma* (*brahmacarya, gārhasṭha, vānapraṣṭha* and *sannyasa*) and specifically his *varṇa dharma* (*brāhmaṇa, kṣatriya, vaiśya* and *śudra*) as mentioned in the *Ṛg Veda, Puruṣasukta*, verse 90. *Varṇa dharma* to Gandhi is prescriptive, injunctive, as rooted in the *veda*-s by the *Pratyakṣa veda*. This standpoint of Gandhi was the centre of debate between him and Ambedkar regarding the question of untouchability which has been
discussed later. The individual must be right and virtuous following the injunctions of his *svadharma*, or assigned duties of his station of life. Such observance of assigned duties, the do-s and don’t-s (*vidhi* and *niṣedha*), can only help man in attaining the state of excellence, the ultimate end of life, and it is towards this end that all activities of man, including politics are directed. Politics is worth pursuing for it is through this activity that man can achieve self–honour and dignity. Self–honour and dignity are in turn essential for human progress. Thus the tradition of India’s culture emphasizes upon the development of the ethico–religious man in pursuit of human excellence instantiated in the life of the epic heroes—*Raghupati* Ram and *Dharmarāj* Yudhisthir. This cultural tradition was followed by Gandhi.

It is not merely true that the two thinkers were products of two entirely different cultures; it is also true that they belonged to two different times. But in spite of the cultural differences of their traditions, in spite of differences in chronological history, it is still possible to bring the thoughts of these two thinkers on a common plane for discussion, not because of their exposition of similar utopian visions of society, but only because both wanted to construct a political order and structure grounded upon a moral ordering of the society. It is here where Plato’s idea of republic can be compared and contrasted with Gandhi’s idea of republic.
1) The Failure:

It is true that Plato’s idea of republic as well as Gandhi’s idea of republic did not succeed in the long-run. Both were constructed as ideals, both remained as ideals and Plato and Gandhi’s attempts to materialize them did not succeed. The failure of their projects is as evident as the virtue of their visions.

The causes for the practical failure of Plato’s projects were rooted in Plato’s constructions regarding state functioning and programming of the political order. The cardinal virtue of justice was the value epitome in Plato’s philosophy both at the level of the individual and of the state. Life in Plato’s republic was to be guided by and directed by nothing other than justice. Hence, Plato’s political programme as construed in The Republic, Statesman and Laws is a programme reflecting and imbibing justice. But the question that arises is that, is the entire political structure as developed and proposed by Plato really conducive to achieving justice? If justice is synonymous with impartiality, with equal treatment and fair practices then the Platonic republic cannot be unequivocally stated to reflect justice.
Different classes of the society are assigned different roles and adherence to such role is justice. Even in such a condition, not each class is assigned its duty. Since, citizenship signifies the political identity of each individual, the exclusion of slaves from the class of citizens deprives them of their political status. Further, the position and the duty of the slaves is not clarified by Plato, though they were a sizeable portion of the population. In depriving them of their political, social, and economic rights Plato’s philosophy can be said to sanction both exploitation and alienation. Economic exploitation of the slaves in the Greek world was a known fact, Plato’s philosophy did nothing to change the state of affairs. Even in not mentioning the station of duties of the slaves his philosophy approves their alienation from the conditions of living. The question that remains is, is such an alienation compatible with justice?

Further, if justice is the ultimate end of the state and happiness is its natural byproduct, then the state which is just ought to be happy. In fact this was what Plato thought to be the end of a perfect ruling art. But can a state be happy until and unless all its parts are happy? What if, at the end of the day a tradesman says he is not happy being a tradesman but will be happy if he becomes a guardian? Interference in another’s job is surely prohibited in
the Platonic order, but can ‘minding one’s own business’ be a criterion for
the psychological condition of happiness?

In the closed structure of the Platonic republic there is little scope for
realizing one’s capacities and fulfilling one’s potential. A strict
regimentation characterizes it. This regimentation is based upon a very strict
education programme. What if, the education programme fails? Plato
seemed to have assumed that there will be no drastic changes in the
education programme in the future. But it deserves to be mentioned that
Plato’s failure to implement his idea of republic in Syracuse was primarily
due to his difference of opinion with King Dionysius II specifically on the
issue as to whether geometry should be included in the educational
curriculum of the future philosopher king. Further, although Plato
elaborately discussed the scheme of education in *The Republic*, he devised
it only for the future philosopher rulers. But if the education process is to
begin at infancy, the qualities of being a philosopher ruler should be evident
in the infants. If it is said that a proper breeding process can ensure the
emergence of such features then is it possible for the state to regulate
articulately every breeding process? Plato himself admitted that improper
breeding and consequent improper education were to be the prime causes
behind the failure of the ideal state. Hence, it can be said that Plato was a
man of his times, he could review and rectify the existing socio–political order but could not look what lied beyond it.

Deriving his roots from and adhering to the ancient cultural tradition of India, Gandhi’s idea of republic do not reflect any regimented order of society. Though he did believe in the varṇa–system, it was as a mere prescription of one’s ancestral duties that he believed in it. His republic does not exclude any section of the populace. Each person is valuable, hence each and every segment of the population is valuable in the social order. The absence of exclusion necessarily involves absence of alienation. Each section has its assigned duties and as a result no one is alienated by the conditions of living in the larger common society. The ultimate end of his philosophy is sarvodaya which implies the rise of all, awakening to the cause of one’s freedom and dignity. Such sarvodaya implies the welfare of all and as such it also implies the happiness of all. In such a condition there is scope for realizing one’s potentiality in the sense of creating one’s own abode.

In fact, Socratic–Plato’s basic emphasis was on the unity of the state. But such extreme unity or unification can destroy the very character of the state. As Aristotle observed, “Is it not quite obvious that a state may at length attain such a degree of unity as to be no longer a state? Since the
nature of a state is to be plurality, and in tending to greater unity, from being a state, it becomes a family, and from being a family, an individual: for the family may be said to be more than the state, and the individual than the family. So that we ought not to attain this greatest unity even if we could, for it would be the destruction of the state. Again, a state is not made up of so many men, but of different kinds of men; for similar do not constitute a state. It is not like a military alliance”. Such an extreme unification is also not conducive to self-sufficiency in the long run.

It is this aim of extreme unification that led Plato to devise his rather novel scheme of the trained guardians (in modern terms bureaucracy), the scheme of the community of wives and children, and the scheme of common property in *The Republic*. This scheme is not practicable for the specific reason, as rightly pointed out by Aristotle, “of the two qualities which inspire regard and affection—that a thing is your own and that it is precious—can neither exist in such a state as this”. If at all this scheme can be practiced, it should be limited to the class husbandman than to the guardians, for this would instill an obedient nature in them and would prevent them from any sort of rebellion. The practice of holding ‘property in common’ which is devised by Plato in *The Republic*, also cannot be supported. Aristotle’s view is worth considering in this regard, “It is clearly better that
property should be private, but the use of it common; *and the special business of the legislator is to create in men this benevolent disposition.* …The exhibition of two excellences, besides, is visibly annihilated in such a state: first, temperance towards women (for it is an honourable action to abstain from another’s wife for temperance sake); secondly, liberality in the matter of property”.⁴

This Aristotelian position is rather similar to Gandhi’s concept of trusteeship where Gandhi dwells on the possibility of a property–structure where property–owners are to act as trustees of the property they possess, so that the use of them can be made for the common man.

The principal criticism of Aristotle against the Platonic scheme of *The Republic* is this, “The citizens who are not the guardians are the majority, and about them nothing has been determined…”⁵ Further in *The Republic* Plato did not discuss the question of the living pattern of the citizens who are not the guardians, of extending the institution of community of wives and children to the others citizens, of their possessing property in common, of their education.

Thus, there arises a basic contradiction in the Platonic end of a perfect ruling art, which is, the legislator ought to make the whole state happy.²¹ Aristotle’s contention is that, since guardians are deprived of happiness, the
others (artisans or the common people) also cannot be happy. This is because, ‘the whole cannot be happy, unless most, or all, or some of its parts enjoy happiness’.  

Further, Plato’s idea of republic as envisaged in *Laws* is also not without its shortcomings. One of the principal shortcomings is contained in Plato’s observation that, it is the objective of the legislator to legislate for the people and for the country.  

But it is not possible for any state to survive on its own, its political life is always in relation to its neighbouring countries. Thus the objective of the state must be to legislate in relation to its neighbours also, apart from itself.

The property regulations in *Laws* is also not totally acceptable. The Platonic injunction that a man should possess so much property that will enable him to live temperately, is according to Aristotle, ‘too general a conception’, For it does not allow such property to be used liberally. But Plato may reply that the Socratic idea of good life shall imbue temperate living. (reference may be made to the Jain view of *aparigraha* as an ethical view adopted by Gandhi, a view discussed earlier).

The primary concern should have been to limit the size of population than property. Aristotle further points out that the concern of scientifically limiting the size of population is absent in *Laws*. Such an aim would be
achieved by calculating the chances of mortality in the children and sterility in married persons. This concern is important for failure to limit the size of population will result in its consequent increase and this is turn will be the cause of poverty and crime and revolution.\textsuperscript{11}

In *Laws* the nature of difference between the rulers and the subject is also not clear. In fact he only says that they are related like the warp and the woof, which are made of different wools.\textsuperscript{12}

The mode of government prescribed in *Laws* is not quite specific. As Aristotle comments, that it is neither democracy nor oligarchy, but something between them which can at best be described as a polity. This form of constitution though being capable of adapted by greater number of states, is far from being an ideal state.\textsuperscript{13} He further contends that, the constitution prescribed in *Laws* has no element of monarchy at all; it is nothing but oligarchy in the garb of democracy. In *The Republic* Plato is for aristocracy; in *Laws* we have a suggestion of democracy. Plato’s ideal scheme of political state has been termed as totalitarian, authoritative, paternalistic, over the years. Such interpretations arise because Plato’s scheme of the ideal republic as presented in *The Republic* exhibit numerous observances regarding the different facets of the socio–political life which suggest that his ideal state will be such where the state is better suited to
control and regulate the individual’s life and affairs. Plato’s prescription of the abolition of family, establishment of the institution of community of wives and children, advocacy of the institution of common breeding and rearing of the guardian class, the common living without possessing any material wealth for the guarding class and the total abolition of private property for them all suggest less scope for individuality and more scope for state control. The greater importance assigned to the state is evident from it being designated as the whole and the individual as the part. Indeed Plato’s insistence on letting the best suited regulate and control the affairs (be it public or private) of the individuals is not only restricted to the authoritarian prescription of *The Republic*. In *Statesman*, the ruler is compared to a doctor who is entitled to look after the hygiene of the people and when required to cure it by his set of commands even by force (293 b). The analogy of the doctor is also introduced in *Crito*, to establish the position that an expert’s opinion must be obeyed irrespective of what the non–experts believe (48a). In *Crito* the state is also compared to a parent (50 d–51 b) since it regulates and arranges for the proper functioning of the important aspects of individual’s life.

It is true that Plato assigns the state a higher authority in his republic. But in Plato’s opinion state power is actually entrusted in the hands of a few
who are educated enough and competent enough to handle the affairs of the state. This rule of the philosopher kings with the aid of the trained bureaucrats is an aristocratic rule. In Platonic terms it is their epistemic status and not any other qualification which entitles them to exercise a rule over others. This epistemic status is acquired through an elaborate education process. Thus, the rule by the guardian class of *The Republic*, by the impersonal laws of *Laws*, the statesman–ruler of *Statesman* can be said to be an authoritarian rule where those who rule does so because they possess what the others lack, a cognitive and a moral competence. This expertise enables them to promulgate a better order of society.

It is in this respect that Plato’s republic differs largely from Gandhi’s republic. The excessive importance given to the state by Plato is totally absent in Gandhi’s political order. In fact, his denunciation of the state as the source of violence often designates him as an anarchist. The Gandhian observation that the ideally non violent state will be an ordered anarchy, follows from his political and economic programme. Politically, his idea of *svarāj* or self–government signified freedom from government control, whether it is foreign or national. Economically, his emphasis on self–sufficient village economy and his idea of trusteeship also diminished the importance of the state. The urge to end militarization and lessen the role of
army is an urge to limit state control. The need to limit the powers of the state arose from his apprehension that otherwise individual freedom and progress will be destroyed. The decentralized mode of governance also implied Gandhi’s dislike for the parliamentary system of government as superimposition. In fact the British model of parliamentary form of government was not approved by him as he was against granting supreme authority to the parliament. The authority of the constitution should be ultimate and the mode of governance was an indirect democracy. All the duties of the state were to be assigned to voluntary associations and no centralized function was to remain except for control of communications, power resources, minerals and forests. These voluntary associations were to be constituted by the satyāgrahi-s or trained volunteers. These volunteers were to discharge all important functions like that of a teacher, a healer, agricultural advisor, peacemakers, latrine superintendents and general servants of the people. The volunteers were to lead a life much like the guardian class of Plato’s republic but without the bureaucratic character. They would be regulated by the moral virtues of chastity and temperance, would not possess any material wealth in excess of their wants and will earn their bread labour. The regulations prescribed for the satyāgrahi-s are purely from the standpoint of dharma. Thus it is dharma which is to regulate
the life of the citizens, those entrusted with regulating the public affairs are also to be bound by the same principle. Considered from a different perspective it is also significant to note that for Gandhi individual freedom was an ultimate value which is why Gandhi advocated a decentralized mode of governance. Yet, this individual freedom was also to be subject to dharma, it was to be bounded and limited by the latter. If Plato’s prescription is to be termed authoritarian, it is so from a political point of view, whereas if Gandhi’s prescription is to be termed authoritarian, it is so from the religio–moral point of view.

The Gandhian position thus cannot be equated to that of a philosophical anarchist. He never advocated the total abolition of the state. What he intended was that the power and the control of the state should be restricted to the bare minimum so that it does not inhibit individual progress.

Though it is true that the period to which Plato belonged and the period to which Gandhi belonged can be viewed as crisis situations, a crisis of freedom against subjugation, a crisis of permanence against change, a crisis of re–establishment of stability against efforts to instill confusion and disorder, yet this crisis was not only in the sphere of politics only. It was also a moral crisis calling for establishment of values to rectify the damage suffered by the social order.
For Gandhi, the crisis of his times was not exactly the same as that of the time of Plato. His crisis was at different levels and of different kinds. For him, India’s political subjugation by the British was one of the many concerns, and the solution to such concerns lay in the establishment of rāmrājya. In fact both inter–religious differences and intra–religious differences were the principal causes of the social upheaval in contemporary India as Gandhi saw it.

The proposed rāmrājya would be a state where there would be complete unity between people professing Hindu and Islam religion. The essential unity of these two religions was emphasized by him throughout his life, his political programmes involved members of all the communities, his ideal of rāmrājya was equally termed as khudārājya, his rāmdhūn essentially a hymn dedicated to glorify the idea of a king personalized in the mythical king, Rāma, also comprised the lines Isvara Āllāh tere nām, emphasizing the essential unity of the Lord of worship of two religions. His political programme of svarāj as the end necessarily involved Hindu–Muslim unity as the means. As he himself said, ‘I see no way of achieving anything in this afflicted country, without…unity between the Hindus and Musalmans of India’. Yet, it is also true, that India achieved independence foregoing this unity and opting for a partition of India, the bulk of the
Muslims opting for a separate state of Pakistan. The eventual partition of India was not only a geographical partition; it was the culmination of a long drawn process of identifying political interests with religious interests. What is interesting to note is that this process of identifying politics with religion was pursued by Gandhi himself. He considered politics and religion to be inseparable from each other and in this respect he differed from others including Nehru, who once said, “I wondered more and more if this was the right method in politics. It seemed to me sheer revivalism…”17 But to Gandhi, this was not revivalism in the sense of turning the clock back, for it was his belief that, involvement in the political affairs of the time was, a religious necessity. He wanted India’s traditional religio–ethical culture to rectify the ills of the modern political idea of state. The ultimate end of the individual is mokṣa or self liberation and to attain this goal one must engage in politics. It was due to this reason that Gandhi extended a religious undertone to every political theory he expounded – satyāgraha, svarāj, rāmrājya, sarvodaya.

In fact, Gandhi’s usage of the term ‘religion’ or ‘religious concepts’ in the political sphere could not be grasped by everybody. His religion did not signify any denominational religion though it is in this sense that the masses understand religion. His self–proclamation of being a sanātani hindu sent a
wrong message to the members of the other religious groups, especially the Muslims. For Gandhi Hinduism signified the traditional religious heritage of India, and sanātani hindu did not mean a staunch adherer of dogmatic Hindu religion, but it indicated a person who imbibes and inculcates the religio-cultural tradition of India free from religious bias. The Muslims were already a minority community before the partition of India, they actually numbered one-fourth of the population. They were less-educated and less affluent than their Hindu counterparts. As an educationally and economically backward large community but with a minority mental set up they were more orthodox, more conservative and were much influenced by their religious leaders. The anxiety of a large minority’s religio-cultural identity against a big religious culture was not given proper attention. In the pre-partition days, the Muslims gradually became apprehensive about their future. As Maulana Azad once stated, “As a community the Muslims are extremely anxious about their future. …They were a minority in India as a whole and were troubled by the fear that their position and status in independent India could not be secure”.18

This feeling of insecurity amongst the Muslims was highlighted even more by their leader Mahammed Ali Jinnah. Jinnah, at the beginning of his career was very much a liberal leader, without any religion bias and was one
of prominent congressmen. He believed in united protest and united mode of action against the British authorities. His differences with Gandhi were chiefly an ideological difference. More specifically Jinnah’s objection was directed against Gandhi’s policy of mingling religion (however liberal and universal by interpretation) with politics. Jinnah wanted independent India to be a political state and not a religious state. Thus, it was his apprehension that Gandhi’s insistence on practice of moral virtues under the shadow of the religious values in political life would bring forth a religious state. It was this apprehension that was accompanied by a apprehension of a Hindu revivalism, of Hindu predominance and consequent insecurity of the Muslims. Jinnah’s transformation from being a secular leader to a communal leader, in fact, can be traced to this cause of apprehension and fear coupled with realizing the need to protect the political interests of the Muslims. It is also true that Jinnah’s popularity increased when he proclaimed himself to be a leader of a ‘nation’. He emphatically stated that the Muslims are a nation, and not a minority community within a nation. “We maintain that Muslims and Hindus are two major nations by any definition or test of a nation. We are a nation of a hundred million, and what is more we are a nation with our distinctive culture and civilization, language and literature, art and architecture, names and nomenclature, sense of value and proportion,
legal laws and moral codes, customs and calendar, history and traditions, aptitudes and ambitions”. This interpretation of nation are read by many as a reaction against Gandhi’s religio-ethical politics, was however not acceptable to Gandhi, who was not ready to accept the Muslims as a nation. “I find no parallel in history for a body of converts and their descendents claiming to be a nation apart from a parent stock. If India was one nation before the advent of Islam, it must remain one in spite of a change of faith of a very large body of her children”. Hence he asserted, “the two-nation theory is an untruth”. However it deserves to be noticed that Gandhi, who was such an ardent critic of the two nation theory himself admitted that the Muslims must have the same right of self determination, as the rest of India. The partition of India was almost certain to happen and Gandhi’s helpless acceptance of it saw the dream of his united India shatter to pieces. It was his own weapon of initiating religion into politics that almost acted as a boomerang, which instead of purifying politics resulted in a situation which Gandhi certainly did not wish to happen.

Besides the concern of Hindu–Muslim unity, the other important concern of Gandhi was surely the removal of the practice of untouchability as also changing the attitude and treatment of the caste Hindus towards the members of the depressed classes. Gandhi’s denunciation of untouchability
was practically due to the fact that he did not want a segregation or disunion within the Hindu community. He not only denounced untouchability in theory, improving the plight of the untouchables constituted a significant project in his constructive programme. For this reason he and his āśramites even performed the practical task assigned to the ‘bhangis’. In fact the term ‘Harijan’ was propounded by Gandhi to denote this special class. What is noteworthy is that in spite of denouncing untouchability in such a vehement way, Gandhi’s belief in the traditional caste system of Hindu religion was firm and steady. His belief in the institution of caste or caturvarṣa is evident from so many of his remarks, as for example, “I consider the four (caste) divisions to be fundamental, natural and essential”. Or “it is not a human invention but an immutable law of nature, the statement of a tendency that is ever present and at work like Newton’s Law of Gravitation”. His conviction in the caste division was so inevitable that he held, “I believe that if Hindu society has been able to stand it is because it is founded on the caste system. …A community which can create the caste system must be said to possess unique powers of organization”. He further viewed this system as essentially an unifying factor, when he held that, “What is the system of varnashrama but a means of harmonizing the differences between high and low, as well as between capital and labour?” It was this belief and
exaltation of the caste system that was the focal point of his ideological differences with Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Ambedkar while espousing the cause of the untouchables, highlighting their sufferings and demanding their political rights, also vehemently denounced the institution of caste as the source of all social stigmas, especially untouchability. His opinion is evident from the following remark, “There will be outcastes as long as there are castes. Nothing can emancipate the outcastes except the destruction of the caste system”.

Ambedkar’s insistence on the destruction of the caste system was so intense that he related it to Hindu religious texts and religious tenets and advocated their destruction. Ambedkar deliberated on several factors of the caste–system, and arrived at a rather noteworthy conclusion, “In my opinion only when the Hindu society becomes a casteless society that it can hope to have strength enough to defend it self. Without such internal strength, swaraj for Hindu may turn out to be only a step towards slavery”. He emphasized on the need for social reforms, a cause neglected by the congress in its pursuance of political reforms. His contention was that a country is not fit for political power that does treat all its citizen equally, and accepts social dominance of one class on another class. Caste is a harmful economic institution for it involves “the subordination of man’s natural powers and inclination to the exigencies of social rule”. His
contention was that, there must be a religion but that religion was not to be the religion of the sāstra-s. Priesthood should be abolished. Priests should be made servants of the state and should be made subject to disciplinary action by the state. His appeal to the Hindus was to examine their religion and corresponding morality in terms of their survival value. In so doing they must decide for themselves whether they “should conserve the whole of their social heritage or select what is helpful and transmit to future generations only that much and no more”. ³⁰ His contention was, “the Hindus must consider whether the time has not come for them to recognize that there is nothing fixed, nothing eternal, nothing Sanatan, that everything is changing, that change is the law of life for individual as well as for society”. ³¹

It is evident from Ambedkar’s above–mentioned observation, that some of these contentions were specifically directed to counter Gandhi’s observations and beliefs. His denunciation of the religious texts, advocacy for the total abolition of caste system, emphasis on the need to review the past and asserting the importance of changed set of values in the changed socio–political scenario are more a critic of Gandhian principles than an assertion of his own position. For Gandhi caste is not related to religion in any way. The institutions of varṇa and āśrama are again not related to caste. What the law of varṇa prescribes is that one should earn his livelihood by
following one’s ancestral duties. It does in no way demarcate and degrade the status of different professions. It also does not in any way support a belief in untouchability. Gandhi introduced the principle of dignity to each and every profession. The essence of Hinduism consists in upholding God as being identical with satya and ahimsā as the law governing human fraternity. Gandhi’s objection to Ambedkar was that Ambedkar had denounced the entire Hindu religion by considering its worst specimens, which is certainly not the correct approach. A proper evaluation of any religion should be made by considering its best elements and not its worst elements. But Ambedkar was protesting against Hinduism as practiced for centuries.

It is evident from this debate, that what Gandhi wanted was a reform within the fold of Hindu religion. It cannot be said that Gandhi succeeded in providing an ultimate solution to the problem of the backward tribes. Even today the socio–political problems of the Dalits continue to disturb the political scenario of modern India. For Gandhi the problems facing man might be varied and diverse as it was in the prevailing conditions of the time. But the solution to them was always uni–faceted. It is in the inherent morality of man that the solutions to such problems can be traced and it is in such ingrained morality that Gandhi found truth (satya) and non–violence
(ahimsā) as the pillars sustaining any theory. But it is also true that if the problems are multi–faceted; the solutions to them cannot be an unitary one. Hence the cause of the failure of all his major projects can be ascribed to leveling down of these diverse concerns to the single realm of morality and moral questions.

The attempt of lending a moral touch to his political movements is evident in Gandhi’s formulation and implementation of satyāgraha. Satyāgraha as a term was used to designate different activities. It was used as the name of a non–cooperation movement, a non–violent warfare and a peaceful rebellion, an emotional coercive measure, apart from its original designation of being a character of the soul. As Bikhu Parekh observes, “With all these changes in his manner of action and language of discourse the very concept of Satyagraha came under strain”.33 Thus, satyāgraha was often interpreted as a ‘tactics’, it was in the sense of ‘tactics’ that Jawaharlal Nehru accepted non–violation.34 However for Gandhi, satyāgraha was not a mere technique, nor a mere policy, to him it was a creed which must be inculcated and lived. Further, the two key concepts involved in the concept of satyāgraha, tapas and brahmacarya were interpreted by Gandhi in a manner different from their original meanings. Besides, satyāgraha demanded the use of soul force to combat evil force. This soul force or the
capacity to attain inner strength can only be achieved by a select few and not by any body and every body. That is why his appeal to the Pols, the Czeks and the Jews to observe satyagraha in the face of Hitler’s aggression went unheeded. It is true that Gandhi demanded too much from the masses. Individuals differ in capacity and in aptitude, what is a desirable trait in one can not be a desirable trait of every body and hence individual satyagraha though possible, collective satyagraha was extremely difficult to achieve.

Beside the political weapon of satyagraha, Gandhi’s dream of rāmrājya also did not materialize. India did achieve independence but it is only in the negative sense (as Gandhi maintained) of the absence of domination. Very much against his scheme, India today is a city–centered, urban country with vast rural background. The villages do subsist but they are neither politically nor economically centers of power. Village industries far from being revived, have given way to industrialization. As against Gandhi’s political scheme of decentralization, India is politically a centralized unit. There is an ever–widening gap between the rich and the poor. Thus the modern state of India is far removed from the Gandhian ideal of rāmrājya.

The failure of Gandhi’s svarāj was a practical failure. His concept of rāmrājya was based upon the essential goodness of man, specifically that of
the governing class. It rested on inculcating and imbibing the moral virtues of mutual trust, benevolence, love, sympathy, charity, selflessness, and above all non-violence and truth. It is in the susceptibility of inculcating such virtues required for the practical rendering of such a religio-political order, that the causes for the failure of Gandhi’s rāmrājya can be ascribed to.

It is difficult for a political scheme to be sustained by a moral scheme, particularly when political philosophers like Rawls are speaking of political values. The failure of Gandhi’s ideal of rāmrājya again exhibited it.

The education scheme of Gandhi did not find its resonance in the education scheme adopted in independent India. A legacy of the British manual of education was followed and Gandhi’s insistence on learning of a craft besides elementary education was again not followed. It is perhaps true that it was the deviance from Gandhi’s ideal of village centered life and a simple need based economy that caused the adoption of an education policy entirely different from the scheme of Naī Tālim. The trend was towards achieving economic growth and economic prosperity. The urge for technological progress created its own system of values and professional ethics. Hence, the Gandhian ideal of sarvodaya was reduced to a mere ideal, the practice of which cannot be traced today at any level of activity or life? The welfare and upliftment of all is restricted to the directive principles of
the state policy of the Constitution. The republic of independent India does not reflect in any way the Gandhian republic of rāmrājya.

2) The Common Concern:

It is true that the practical rendering of both Plato’s idea of republic and Gandhi’s idea of republic did not happen. But the question that remains is that, do the practical failure of their projects suggest the failure of their visions? Do Plato’s theoretical construction and Gandhi’s theoretical construction possess no merit because of their failure to materialize them in actuality? It is in view of such question that we can approach ‘the two ideas of republic’ and their basic principles from the point of view of philosophy, for what these two ideas portray is really a philosophical question and a philosophical concern. Considered from a reflective point of view the ‘two ideas of republic’ raises and tries to answer a fundamental question of life and existence, namely, what is the life we should live? If the answer consists in saying we should live a good life, the question can ultimately be rephrased as, how to live a good life? An attempt to answer this question is an evident in both Plato’s socio–political theorizing and Gandhi’s socio–political theorizing with the help of a common aid, that of moral constructionism.
The political theory of justice, state–craft, citizenship, statesmanship, and laws as visualized in *The Republic*, and put into a structured thinking in *Statesmen, and Laws, are* basically Plato’s reply to Socratic question of ‘how should one live’? In this context it is pertinent to deliberate upon the observations of Bernard Williams, who in his *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* refers to the same issue. This question is essentially about a manner of life and about a whole life.\(^{35}\) This question is so important to Socrates, for “…the unexamined life …is not worth living”.\(^{36}\)

To Plato, ethical power is actually the power of reason, it cannot be justified by a force but it can be turned into a force. The question of turning ethical power into a force is a problem of politics. His observation is particularly significant in this regard. “For Plato, the political problem of making the ethical into a force was the problem of making society embody the rational justification and that problem could only have an authoritarian solution. If, by contrast the justification is addressed to a community that is already an ethical one, then the politics of ethical discourse, including moral philosophy, are significantly different. The aim is not to control the enemies of the community or its shirkers, but by giving reason to people already disposed to hear it, to help in continually creating a community held together by the same disposition”.\(^{37}\)
This observation of Williams is helpful in understanding the Platonic shift in moral approach from *The Republic* to *Statesman* to *Laws*. The authoritarian prescription of *The Republic* was necessary to make the society accept the rational justification of ethical power and once that had been achieved, the task was to maintain the steady state of affairs by the regulations of the statesman and by a set of laws. Comparably, Gandhi believed that the people of India by their tradition of *Dharmasāstra* and *Arthasāstra* were culturally, ethico–religiously disposed to accept an rāmrājya.

Williams also observes for Socrates and for Plato, the trait of ethical desirability lies in the agent. “The demand to show to each person that justice was rational for that person meant that the answer has to be grounded first in an account of what sort of person it was rational to be”. But it is not egoistic in the sense that it is designed to satisfy a set of ‘individual satisfactions’ before ethical deliberations. It is egoistic in the sense that it serves to show to each individual that he has ‘good reasons to live ethically’. The aim of such a position “…is to give an account of the self into which that life fits”. This account of the self helps one to realize that ‘a life of justice’ does not exist outside oneself but it is a life that is rational for him to pursue. This state is the state of ‘eudaimonia’, “…but eudaimonia was a
matter of the shape of one’s whole life. I shall use the expression well-being for such a state”. 40 The question of well-being was for Socrates, based upon the well-being of the soul, for its capacity to develop virtues can lead to the state of well-being.

This question is also the implied question of Gandhi’s philosophy. To Gandhi, life of the individual is continuity. A man’s political life, social life, religious life, ethical life, economic life is not separate lives and are consequently not divided. They are different aspects of Gandhi’s philosophy is ultimately about this continuous life of man. As Woodcock observes, “all his struggles however various in their immediate aims, were concerned fundamentally with the quality of living”. 41 In fact Gandhi’s contention is also that ‘the lived life’ and ‘the possible life’ ought to be identical. This is what he meant when he said ‘my life is my message’. The emphasis on the quality of living is evident from Gandhi’s concept of values, ideology and belief system. His objection against modern civilization and its corresponding value system is in fact a denunciation of a material life conducive to the concept of utility. Hence, his condemnation of the dominance of industries and machinery is actually a denial of the non-existence, non-being of man in such a mode of civilization. For Gandhi true civilization prescribes such a pattern of conduct following which one should
perform one’s duty. In this interpretation of civilization it is clear that it is in
the performance of one’s duty that a man discovers himself; dharma not
only protects the individual but also leads to good life through self–
knowledge.

Hence, to work is to live and to live is to exist. This point of view
finds its culmination in a significant remark in the Hind Swaraj, “India’s
salvation consists in unlearning what she has learnt during the last fifty
years. The railways, the telegraphs, hospitals, lawyers, doctors and such like
have to go: and the so called upper classes have to learn consciously,
religiously and deliberately the simple present life, knowing it to be a life–
giving true happiness”.42 This concept of ‘life–giving true happiness’ is
equivalent to the Plato–Aristotelian concept of ‘state of eudaimonia’ or
Bernard Williams’s later interpretation of ‘state of well–being’. This state of
‘true happiness’ of ‘eudaimonia’ or ‘well–being’ is a lived life of simplicity,
of naivety, of chastity.

This view of life is also apparent from Gandhi’s denunciation of
modern civilization and machinery. The growth of machinery is unwanted
for it leads to unemployment, concentration of wealth in the hands of few,
growth of state power and more of violence. Thus it results in enslavement,
degradation of human dignity and alienation of man from his work. If to live
is to work and to exist is to live a good life, a man alienated from his work is surely non-existent. It pronounces the non-being of man. This view of human existence and its denial embedded in the advancement of modern technology and modern mode of civilization was unequivocally shared along with Gandhi by the existentialist philosopher, Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) in his later works.

Heidegger while deliberating on the spiritual health of modern civilization identified violence of machinery as one of the disease of modernity, the others being, loss of gods and loss of dwelling. Loss of gods degenerates a community to a society, for a community is bound by a common commitment to a shared conception of good life whereas a society is bound together by nothing more than mutual self-interest. A community is preserved by certain authoritative, exemplary, figures whom Heidegger calls ‘gods’. It is the absence of these gods which causes the degeneration of community into a society, a Kultur into a civilization. Loss of dwelling involves two aspects, first, loss of homeliness and second, modern man’s inability to ‘own’ death. This loss is the cause of human suffering and also of the anxiety of being-in-the-world. Violence of machinery or modern technology is the third symptom of the disease of modern civilization. It reduces both non-human and human nature to a raw material in the process
of production and consumption. Modern technology thus can be contrasted with Greek technology. Any technology centers around causation. Causation, for the Greeks meant ‘bringing forth’ or ‘bringing forth out of concealment’. But in modern civilization, causation means making happen. Thus the Greek technology which is termed as ‘poiesis’ was characterized by a gentleness since the world was conceived as a holy place whereas modern technology is characterized by violence.43 “The machine that was supposed to be our slave has become instead our master. Human being has lost its apartness, has itself became part of the to–be–exploited, has become part of the exploited, has become, as contemporary language–modernity’s ‘house of being’ – indeed tells as, ‘human resource’ [Material]”.44 Evidently an individual is transformed from a person to a mere resource in modern civilization. This is because man is always at work and has lost its ‘authentic holiday’. It is only when a man ceases to be a resource and exists as ‘human being’ he has his authentic holiday. To be a human being means ‘to dwell’. So “as praxis…dwelling is guardianship of, caring for, ‘the abode’ of our world”.45 It is this return from destitution to dwelling that can save human existence in this modern civilization.

The purpose behind considering Heidegger’s later philosophy is this, Heidegger’s analysis of the gradual wearing out of human existence in our
civilized, industrialized, modern era is an analysis achieved by a different methodology and by different approach to arrive at the same conclusion at which Gandhi arrived by his very Indian approach and methodology. The concern for humanity’s real existence and the apprehension of losing it in a world that is reduced to a world of commodities was genuine philosophical concern for Gandhi, as it was for Heidegger. Heidegger, wrote these years after Gandhi died, and there is no evidence that they knew each other. Yet, Gandhi’s and Heidegger’s thoughts about man and machine and industrial civilization hold before us a philosophy of man that is so similar.

It is here that both Plato and Gandhi also meet with a philosophy of man that man’s life is primarily a moral being’s quest for good life. Plato’s concern about the original Socratic question about what is good life and Gandhi’s concern about the lived life of the individual are reduced to the same concern, ‘to make the lived life a good life’. Though the question was the same the answers to it were different for they were shaped by the different traditions in which they were born, lived and grew up. Yet, the basic principle was the same in both their philosophies. The egoism of Plato, in the sense of making the good life dependent upon the goodness of the individual was shared by Gandhi too, for to him it was all the more true that the external world was an extension of inner self and it was possible to make
changes in the external world by initiating such changes within oneself. The concern for ‘justice’ in Plato and for ‘freedom’ in Gandhi were concerns about the individual man no less than they were concerns about the political structures in which they lived.

It is in this context that a very basic question about these two philosophies can be raised. Is it possible for a political structure to be sustained by a pure moral ordering? Can a set of moral values and virtues which can be observed and inculcated on an individual plane really sustain a political order in the current democratic and economic state of affairs? It is in this context that we can take note of John Rawls and his interpretation of political structure and political values. Rawls in his article, ‘Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical’ (1985), clarifies that the theory of ‘justice as fairness’ as extended in his book, A Theory of Justice is in fact a political conception of justice. It was so framed so as to be applicable to the basic structure of modern constitutional democracy. In this structure a workable conception of justice must be such that it can allow a diversity of doctrines and plurality of conflicting yet incommensurable conceptions of the good that can be assented to by the members of the already existing democratic structure of the society.46
So the aim of ‘justice as fairness,’ is a practical aim. It is applicable to a society characterized by a fair system of cooperation, a society where an individual leads his whole life. In this society a citizen is defined as someone who is a fully cooperating member of society over a complete life.\textsuperscript{47} Such citizens are free and equal in three respects, first, they are free for they regard themselves as well as others as possessing the moral power to have ‘a conception of good’. They are also free in possessing the requisite moral power of sense of justice. It is because of this that their identity as free persons do not change with the changing conception of good. Second, the citizens are free for they can consider themselves as ‘self–originating sources of valid claims’. Third, they can also be regarded as free for they are capable of taking responsibility for their ends and this do affect as to how their various claims are assessed.\textsuperscript{48}

If citizens are thus viewed as free and equal, social unity assumes a new meaning. “Social unity and allegiance of citizens to their common institutions are not founded on their all affirming the same conception of the good, but on their publicly accepting a political conception of justice to regulate the basic structure. The concept of justice is independent from and prior to the concept of goodness in the sense that its principles limit the conception of good which are permissible”.\textsuperscript{49} Rawls sums up his contention
by stating that a conception of political justice demands that a conception to be stable depends upon how far the conditions to which it leads support comprehensive religious, philosophical and moral doctrines which can overlap to constitute a stable agreement. “In a society marked by deep divisions between opposing and incommensurable conceptions of the good, justice as fairness enables us to conceive how social unity can be both possible and stable”.

Thus, Rawls in this article provided a novel interpretation and means to conserve the stability of social unity and social progress through the concept of a political value, an aim tried to be achieved both by Plato and Gandhi which of course could not be eventually materialized by them due to adopting moral values to solve a political issue.

In fact, what this study exposes is that all these different observations deal with a common concern though approached from different stand points. When Plato discussed his idea of republic he discussed it from the standpoint of morality and citizenship. When Gandhi discussed his idea of republic he discussed it from the standpoint of a religio–moral man of the tradition. When Heidegger denounced the nuances of modern civilizations, he discussed it from the standpoint of existentialist philosophy and his existential priorities. Again when Rawls interpreted the concept of justice
and stability he discussed it from the standpoint of politics and political values. But their basic concern was to interpret the values, that regulate the activities of man in the world of diverse problems often determined by the historical necessities. The study focuses on this issue with special reference to the ‘two ideas of republic’ as developed by Plato and Gandhi.

References and Notes:

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