

# Beyond the Pyramidic Structures: Gandhi's Vision of Oceanic Circle

Praveen Dhanda\*

## Abstract

This paper seeks to elucidate Gandhi's vision articulated through the metaphor of 'oceanic circle'. This conception, at the level of thought, makes a departure from some of the axiomatic features of modernity or modern civilisation and articulates an alternative conception of a non-hierarchical society. This 'idealised' figurative blueprint of society, beyond the dominant pyramidic organisational structures of modern societies, keeps the idea of decentralisation at its core. By setting the theoretical context to make sense of Gandhi's engagement with modernity and its organising principles, this paper explores Gandhi's formulation of 'oceanic circle'. It also elaborates on some associated aspects which may help to perceive this idea in the wider matrix of Gandhi's thought.

**Key Words:** Oceanic Circle, Gandhi, Gandhian thought, Gandhi's Critique of Modernity, Decentralisation.

## Introduction

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi is known for making extraordinary contributions towards the evolution of modern Indian political canon. In the vast terrain of his ideas, the figurative conception of oceanic circle articulates his ideal of an alternative way of imagining and organisation of society. Through this idea, by keeping the notion of decentralisation at its core, Gandhi presents a creative and 'idealised' response to the modern hierarchal social structures. This vision is not pyramidic - unlike, for instance, the modern bureaucratic structures where hierarchy and centralisation are the organising principles - but is imagined as an oceanic circle. A perusal of this blueprint, which Gandhi, on the cusp of country's independence, thought is appropriate for India, emboldens one to both contest and reimagine some of the central tendencies of the phenomenon called modern civilisation.

This paper seeks to revisit Gandhi's conception of oceanic circle and is structured under three broad rubrics. First section, by drawing upon varied scholarly interpretations of Gandhi's engagement with modernity, attempts to knit the theoretical context of the aforesaid discussion. It also focusses on Gandhi's broader critique of some of the central tenets, like the centralising tendency, of modern civilisation/modernity. An appreciation of this critical engagement, one argues, is quite pivotal to comprehend Gandhi's idea of oceanic circle. By delving upon Gandhi's interview published in Harijan on 28 July 1946, the second section elucidates the framework of oceanic circle. The endeavour here is to mark the key features of the concept. Next section discusses some associated aspects which can be helpful to perceive the scheme of oceanic circle in the wider milieu of various leitmotifs of Gandhi's thought. The concluding section briefly revisits some criticisms of the conception of oceanic circle along with summing up of its key features.

## Theoretical Prelude

### *Gandhi's Engagement with Modernity*

Gandhi's engagement with modernity has been one of the prominent sites of academic interpretations. His position vis-a-vis modernity has implications for understanding many other concepts advanced by him. Gandhi has been interpreted as a traditionalist, as a modernist and as a post-modernist simultaneously. For instance, Ronald Terchek argues that Gandhi 'wants a reformed tradition to stand, erectly and resolutely, to confront modernity'. His position on the question of Gandhi's relationship with modernity leans towards a

\* Asstt. Professor, Dept. of Political Science, Indraprastha College of Women, University of Delhi

tradition centric interpretation. Thomas Pantham has argued that Gandhi's 'project or programme is one of overcoming modernism without regressing to traditionalism. In his approach, there is a merging of the reconstruction of Indian tradition and the reconstruction of Western modernity'. Anthony Parel notes that Gandhi's 'attitude towards modern civilisation, though critical, is not wholly negative. Being critical implies the desire to improve the object criticised'. Gandhi, indeed, was quite appreciative about the number of contributions made by the West. These include, for instance, civil liberty, equality, rights, prospects for improving the economic conditions of life, liberation of women from tradition, and religious toleration. However, while approving, he also inserted certain qualifications, as Parel says, liberty has to harmonise with swaraj, rights with duties, empirical knowledge with moral insights and so on.

Rudolph and Rudolph pick up a number of thematics from Gandhi and post-modernist thought to put forward that Gandhi fits well into a version of post-modernism in both historical and epistemological terms. For example Gandhi was one of the foremost thinkers to challenge the notion of 'progress' which is a central tenet of modernity. Similarly Gandhi's conception of relative truth falls in the genre of post-modernist thought. 'Gandhi anticipates a good deal of postmodernist thinking by taking the view that, at best, humans can know partial and contingent truths'. According to David Hardiman Gandhi was an advocate of alternative modernity and his relationship with modernity was actually dialogic rather than antagonistic. Gandhi was not totally against modern civilisation per se but was against its 'evils'.

Despite all these scholarly positions, without fear of contradiction, it is plausible to argue that Gandhi was not a passive recipient of modernity and all that it represent as a constellation. Gandhi was quite appreciative about the number of contributions made by the modern civilisation including some of the enlightenment ethos however simultaneously he was critical of certain foundational principles of modernity including its centralising tendency in almost every aspect of human life. Gandhi's case for an alternative imagination of society in the figurative form of oceanic circle and his suspicion for pyramidic structures, which are a necessary aspect of modernity, emanates from such critical approach of him. In many ways Gandhi's vision of oceanic circle, one can argue, not only makes a departure from some of this axiomatic feature of modernity or modern civilisation, but also chalks-out an alternative conception of a non-hierarchical society. Thus Gandhi's critical engagement with modernity can assist us to weave the theoretical milieu in which his conception of oceanic circle can be placed.

#### ***Modernity and its Organising Principle: Centralising Tendency and Pyramidic Structures***

Modern urban-industrial civilisation was approached critically by Gandhi and thus many of its tendencies and features like centralising tendency, homogenisation, industrialisation leading to centralised mass production etc. were also reflected upon with suspicion by him. Gandhi saw, as Bhikhu Parekh observes, modern civilisation 'primarily through the eyes of its victims'. For Gandhi modern Western civilisation lacked self restraint as it is devoid of a sense of direction and purpose. Gratifications based on materialism are at the core of modern civilisation's conception of human being. The unbridled hunger for profit has fostered a mad rush for mechanisation and industrialisation leading to centralisation in production, power and organisational structures. Nevertheless, Gandhi notes, this phenomenon inevitably invite colonial expeditions and thus violence becomes the logical corollary of this trend. Exploitation of fellow human beings is, in consequence, built into the very structures of modern urban-industrial civilisation. Another key feature of modern civilisation is that it is based on 'naive rationalism'. For Gandhi this rationalism is inherently hierarchical and missionary and thus has deep imperialist orientation as it has a tendency to homogenise and suppress diversity.

The centralisation of production in the modern economy, according to Gandhi, created social and economic problems of national and international magnitude. This also provided impetus to a centralised political agency to deal with such problems. Thus the emergence of highly centralised and bureaucratic modern state enjoying and guarding its monopoly of political power is also a necessary product of this civilisation. The state, for Gandhi, has a vested institutional interest in remaining at the centre of the social life and creating the illusion that the problems of the society are too complex and intractable to be solved by ordinary citizens acting individually or collectively, and therefore should be left to the state and its official agencies. Thus under the conditions ordained by the modern civilisation, almost in every arena of life, centralising tendencies, where every aspect of life is drawn toward a centre or brought under the control of a central authority, become

prominent. This way centralisation of economic, political and social power thus comes to be the hallmark of modern societies.

Naturally, the pyramidal structures of organisations are an essential outcome in such conditions. This point can be corroborated by Max Weber's formulations in context of modernity or modern civilisation. Weber, the canonical figure in sociology, has argued that the pivotal aspect of modern societies is 'rationality'. The key dimensions of 'rationality', inter alia, are efficiency, calculability, predictability and control through increasing use of technology. The 'goal-rational action' and 'rational-legal authority', according to Weber, form the central aspects of modern societies. One of the key manifestations of rationality in the West, according to Weber, was the emergence of modern bureaucracy. He also goes on to formulate an 'ideal type' of bureaucracy, of which, among other features, hierarchy is the key characteristic. Hierarchy and the pyramidal structures continue to form the basic template of organisational structures, and also of the society in general, in modern settings.

Gandhi's response, as noted above, was critical to many aspects of modern civilisation. His endeavour was also, along with presenting a critique, to indicate an alternative blueprint to the modern Western civilisation. His formulation of oceanic circle one may submit, can be appreciated as part of his broader endeavour to sculpt an alternative schema of the societal organisation to modern West. Gandhi, in this direction, presented a framework and alternative imagination of the organisation of society. He envisions the organisation of society – instead in a pyramidal way, a hallmark of modern civilization – like oceanic circle. In an interview to the press, which was published in Harijan on 28 July 1946, Gandhi presents this vision.

### ***Gandhi's Alternative Vision: Not Pyramidal but Oceanic Circle***

Gandhi compares his ideal social order to the ever-widening circles that result when a stone is dropped in the ocean. Key characteristic of this conception is non-hierarchy. Describing the organisation of society in the form of oceanic circle, Gandhi puts forward that his alternative structure shall be 'composed of innumerable villages' in which 'there will be ever-widening, never-ascending circles'. In this framework 'Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units'. In this scheme, therefore, 'the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle but will give strength to all within and derive its own strength from it'.

Modern hierarchical systems are both embedded in and also emanates from pyramid like societal organisations. Gandhi's suspicion for crushing hierarchal system is quite evident in his conception of oceanic circle. He also allots a central role to the individual and the village in his scheme. This way Gandhi suggests to radically alter the power equations prevailing in modern societies where power moves from top to bottom. In Gandhi's blueprint all the constituting elements, or each of the oceanic circle, will be placed on equal footing and in an interdependent and yet in an independent way. The intensity of each inner circle is more prominent, which keeps on decreasing with 'ever widening, never ascending circles'. Thus the outer circle will not crush the inner circle but would both derive and give strength to it.

Decentralisation and wide diffusion of power, contrary to the modern top-down hierarchal systems, is at the heart of Gandhi's vision. In the same interview in Harijan Gandhi states that, 'independence must begin at the bottom' and for this to take place, 'every village will be a republic or panchayats having full powers'. Here again village, governed under panchayats, is envisioned as the primary site in the scheme of oceanic circle. Local self government thus forms the key aspect of Gandhi's vision. Further egalitarianism, according to Gandhi, is the essence of this alternative vision. He was sure that, 'if there ever is to be a republic of every village in India, then I claim verity for my picture in which the last is equal to the first or, in other words, no one is to be the first and none the last'. Gandhi's conception of non-hierarchical and egalitarian notion of village is clearly underlined in this statement.

Self sufficiency, as far as possible, should be the hall mark of such local units. Gandhi maintains that, 'every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world. It will be trained and prepared to perish in the attempt to defend itself against any onslaught from without. Thus, ultimately, it is the individual who is the unit'. However here Gandhi is not

arguing that in his blueprint people will shun away from any contact with the outside world. Rather the relationship with the outside world shall be of interdependence, however from the perspective of and primacy to the local. Gandhi clarifies that his vision 'does not exclude dependence on and willing help from neighbours or from the world. It will be free and voluntary play of mutual forces'. Such a society, Gandhi insists 'is necessarily highly cultured in which every man and woman knows what he or she wants and, what is more, knows that no one should want anything that others cannot have with equal labour'. The transformation of the individual in an ethical framework, who learns to rule over himself, also a core idea of Gandhi's conception of swaraj, is underlined here. In this scheme, the enlightened individuals will be aware about their true needs and desires, and thus egalitarianism shall be the hallmark of such a society. In this context, it must be noted that Gandhi's notion of violence is not restricted to physical violence, but includes the 'structural violence'. For instance, Gandhi always maintained that poverty is the worst form of violence.

Truth and non-violence is cardinal to any conceptual innovation of Gandhi and this is also true about his conception of oceanic circle. As he states categorically in the aforesaid interview: 'this society must naturally be based on truth and non-violence which, in my opinion, are not possible without a living belief in God, meaning a self-existent, all-knowing living Force which inheres every other force known to the world and which depends on none and which will live when all other forces may conceivably perish or cease to act'. Further this vision of oceanic circle is based on full and equal space for all the faiths. Gandhi notes that 'in this picture every religion has its full and equal place. We are all leaves of a majestic tree whose trunk cannot be shaken off its roots which are deep down in the bowels of the earth. The mightiest wind cannot move it'.

Such a vision, of course, is based on 'appropriate technology' and decentralised production. The power will not be concentrated at the top – as in case of pyramid like structures. Gandhi forcefully argues that in the framework of oceanic circle 'there is no room for machines that would displace human labour and that would concentrate power in a few hands ... Every machine that helps every individual has a place'. Gandhi does not elaborate and specify the type of machines which can be used. However his touchstones in this context would be that such a technology should not be labour displacing and also must not concentrate wealth and power in the hands of few because this would dilute his vision of oceanic circle and give rise to pyramid like structure of society.

This blueprint, of course, can invite the charge of being romantic and impractical. Gandhi appears conscious about the idealised element in his scheme. He himself confronts the suspicion: 'I may be taunted with the retort that this is all Utopian and, therefore, not worth a single thought'. But then he invokes an analogy, 'if Euclid's point, though incapable of being drawn by human agency, has an imperishable value, my picture has its own for mankind to live. Let India live for this true picture, though never realizable in its completeness. We must have a proper picture of what we want, before we can have something approaching it'. This precisely is the relationship between the ideal and the real. In fact Gandhi was fond of invoking Euclid's formulations in geometry to illustrate the relationship between the ideal and the real in his ideas. Euclid's line, for instance, is a line without breadth that no one is able to draw and never will. But Gandhi says that, at the same time, it is only by keeping the ideal in mind that one can make progress in geometry. And it is true of every ideal, and his conception of oceanic circle is like that ideal.

It shall be helpful to state here that Gandhi's idea of oceanic circle is an 'idealised' conception. Gandhi profusely uses such concepts. Such concepts, to state an analogy used by Rudolph and Rudolph, are like infinity in calculus. The formation of the concept is useful because of various reasons including providing a base for reasoning and knowledge.

Thus Gandhi was aware that his conception is an ideal, but an ideal worth striving for. It is possible that such a scheme of oceanic circle may not be completely achievable in reality; nonetheless it remains important because it provides us an ideal and desirable end-state. However Gandhi was not sure if the Congressmen, and all those who revered him as Mahatma, would also accept his vision. As he states, 'Congressmen themselves are not of one mind even on the contents of Independence. I do not know how many swear by non-violence or the charkha or, believing in decentralization, regard the village as the nucleus'. Rather, on the contrary, he says, 'many would have India become a first-class military power and wish for India to have a strong centre and build the whole structure round it'. Needless to say the trajectory of the state and society in India, with some exceptions, has taken almost a diametrically opposite route to Gandhi's 'Euclid's

point'. India's elites have broadly adhered to what can be called, high techno-industrial modernity, in its development trajectory.

So far we have primarily relied on Gandhi's vision articulated and published in Harijan on 28 July 1946 for deciphering the tenets of his vision of oceanic circle. However various themes articulated and evoked in this particular conception have also been reoccurring subjects throughout Gandhi's oeuvre. These central currents of Gandhi's thought, of course, also relate to his larger vision. A synoptic survey of these themes and associated aspects, hence, may not be out of context here.

### ***Some Related Aspects of Gandhi's Thought***

An appreciation of Gandhi's vision of oceanic circle opens up an engagement with a gamut of Gandhi's interrelated ideas like reformation of individual, ethics of consumption, Sarvodya, Swaraj, an alternative perspective on technology and industrialisation, ideas on village and its relationship with the city, democratic decentralisation and so on. These aspects of Gandhi's thinking may both assist one to appreciate this figurative conception and also are quite pivotal to his conviction to organise society on the lines of oceanic circle.

A reformed individual is an important aspect of Gandhi's thought bearing implications on his concepts like oceanic circle. It necessitates moral issues like ethics of consumption and 'bread labour' which are important part of Gandhi's worldview with reference to creation of such an individual. Gandhi insists on 'bread labour' by every one and persistently emphasised the importance of work in human being's personal growth. The essence here is to emphasise the dignity of physical and manual labour. Bread labour involves that people gain satisfaction, utilities, and enjoyment from work. Any technology which dehumanises people is not consistent with bread labour, however there will be a good amount of far more modern technology, of a different kind, which complement the idea of bread labour. Thus the work according to the idea of bread labour is a creative work and, in Gandhi's framework, only possible in a society in which crushing hierarchies are absent. This is in contrast with the nature of production in modern techno-industrial pyramidal systems which focus only on means to earn a livelihood, on a single monotonous work through the use of dehumanising technology leading to alienation and 'joyless economy' under the conditions of hierarchical systems. Similarly to create an ideal 'individual', Gandhi argues against unbridled consumption and multiplication of desires. This idea asserts that an 'individual's welfare is best achieved not, as economic theory suggests, by attempting to maximise the satisfaction of a multiplicity of desires subject only to the prevailing budget constraint, but rather by reflecting on one's desires and trying to choose between them'. His insights on ethics of consumption are central to the individual's conception of self her/his relationship with the society and the nature. Gandhi also advocated a multifaceted constructive programme to rejuvenate the individual and society at large.

The concept of sarvodya, a sanskrit word which means welfare of all, remains an important part of Gandhi's worldview. This idea considerably overlaps with what Gandhi is trying to convey through oceanic circle. However such an ideal, naturally, according to Gandhi's thinking, is not possible in the modern hierarchical systems where power is concentrated at the top. Sarvodya not only means rising and participation of all irrespective of class, caste, creed, region or religion but also blossoming of all the faculties - physical, mental and spiritual of the human being. A proper interpretation of sarvodya suggests that development should begin from the lowest and weakest. This way Gandhi rejected the utilitarian guide, articulated by nineteenth century philosopher Jeremy Bentham, and replaced it with sarvodya. It 'is a full-fledged alternative to the utilitarian goal of using an existing resource base for output of goods available for consumption. Rather, it seeks to develop resources to enable a decent life for everyone'.

Gandhi's conception of oceanic circle is antithetical to centralised scheme of production which is key feature of high techno-industrial modernism. Hence Gandhi's ideas on alternative industrialisation and, what can be described as, 'appropriate' technology are not only unusual but also set him apart from the mainstream thinking on these issues. Gandhi's insistence on this aspect also provides basis for the concept of swadeshi which literally means indigenous or home-grown. Gandhi's initial views on industrialisation, technology etc. are articulated in Hind Swaraj. In the chapter on the 'machinery' in Hind Swaraj, Gandhi states his position on machinery or technology. He says, 'machinery is the chief symbol of modern civilisation' and 'it represents a great sin'. Gandhi, as it is quite (in)famous, saw modern technology with great suspicion. Though it must be

stated that his rejection of the modern technology was not wholesome and willy-nilly and his position changed with time. The underlying current of his suspicion for modern technology rests on various aspects. One of the prominent reasons for this is the problem of unemployment which, Gandhi maintained, the modern technology necessarily creates. Further, for Gandhi, the application of modern capital intensive technology accentuates all types of inequalities and leads to concentration of power in the hands of few. This naturally is in direct contradiction to the essence of the idea of oceanic circle. 'Organisation of machinery', Gandhi says, 'for the purpose of concentrating wealth and power in the hands of a few and for the exploitation of many I hold to be altogether wrong. Much of the organisation of machinery of the present age is of that type'. Gandhi also associates the phenomenon of colonialism, unlike many of his contemporaries who saw the colonialism as all evil and modern civilisation as benevolent, with Western techno-industrialism itself. He also draws attention to the infeasibility of reproducing Western techno-industrialisation in Indian conditions. Gandhi also argued that it is inherently exploitative.

This suspicion for modern technology and industrialisation, resulting into mass production and concentration of power and thus fostering unequal exploitative relationships, is one of the central recurring themes in the writings of Gandhi. Thus high techno-industrialism leading to mass production, for him, is nothing but a control of majority by small minority. The pyramid like structures of organisations, and in fact, that of whole society is quite inevitable in such a scheme.

For Gandhi the application of modern mass production technologies, naturally, results into centralised production. This inevitably leads to concentration of power which is an anathema to him. This has been an implication of modern technology resulting in mass production in case of industrialised societies. Mass production often takes place in cities or industrial towns and power gets concentrated in the hands of few. Production and distribution, labour and material all become increasingly concentrated and centralised. Gandhi alternatively attempted to envision a non-violent 'diffused' social order which is largely non-exploitative. Oceanic circle envisages an idealised version of such a social order.

The alternative Gandhi was sculpting has the objective to disperse and decentralise the economic power as wide as possible. In his idea of India there is no room for machines that would displace human labour and that would concentrate power in few hands. Though, every machine that helps individual has a place. It must be noted that Gandhi's critique of technology, which is a specific application of science, was not as absolute as it is often made out to be - particularly viewed in context of his later writings. In essence, what Gandhi was critical of was the idea to turn both science and technology into fetish. 'Gandhi', as argued by Hardiman, 'wanted instead a civilisation rooted in ethical science and technology, by which he meant investigation and invention that was applied to human need on a human scale'. The application of this ethical science and technology would result into – instead of a hierarchical pyramid – an organisation of society synchronous with Gandhi's scheme of oceanic circle.

For Gandhi, of course, technology can make a positive contribution. However, this can be done only if the endeavour is informed by a moral vision. This moral vision is tied, and looks at the discourse, from the perspective of poor and marginalised – the last person. This vision can be found, according to Gandhi, as Parel notes, in dharma - dharma not as a subjective legitimising device, but something embedded in satya or truth. Satya is discoverable, in Gandhi's paradigm, by the natural power of soul. The satya stipulates that the nature of technology that is appropriate for India and similarly placed societies should meet the needs of the masses. The modern technology, which represents the mass production and not the production by the masses, historically has tended to reward the powerful and those who are skilled in it. It has marginalised the poor, the weak and those who are differently skilled (say in agriculture or craft). Hence Gandhi wants a technology that would improve the material welfare, particularly from the perspective of the last person, of all - not just of the rich and 'educated' and thus becoming the very basis of self-rule. 'His debate is not on whether India needs technology; his debate is on the kind of technology that India needs'. As a corollary, what he argued was that we must have industry, but of the right kind.

Gandhi constantly maintained that putting into practice of western techno-industrialism usually leads to unequal exchange between town and country, with the tilt tipping against the village. This would happen, particularly, during a rush for rapid industrialisation – an idea which became dominant right away after independence in India. In fact Gandhi's ideas on the village and its relationship with the city were also quite

unusual. He was one of the initial thinkers who pokes at the growing asymmetry between the city and the village. To Gandhi it is imperative to rejuvenate the village against the big city, and individual against the machine. The decentralised scheme in which the village and the 'local' is the locus of production dovetail well with the essence articulated in the notion of oceanic circle. To rejuvenate the village against the big city Gandhi called for decentralised and diffused 'rural industrialisation' with the objective of 'work for all'. In Gandhi's alternative scheme industrial production shall not be concentrated in few urban or industrial centres. Such concentration, he held, along with the exploitation of rural masses, accumulates wealth and power in urban centers at the expense of villages. In his formulation, alternatively, the dynamo of power is the village and the 'local'. The village was to be a knot in a system of oceanic circles in which the remotest circle derived its strength from the center, i.e., the individual. This would lead to absence of concentration of wealth and power at the top, again a key feature of modern pyramidal structures.

This decentralised scheme of production will go hand in hand with democratic decentralisation of decision making. This would mean that sovereignty was not to remain concentrated at any one level. It was to be diffused among units horizontally placed. The 'local' shall be the site of power and decision making. To ensure that power resides with the people, Gandhi preferred community based governance through democratic decentralisation. This conception moves away from a hierarchical bureaucracy based governance with the objective to foster participatory governance. Gandhi was quite critical of centralised state and argued a minimalist role for it. He was for a wide diffusion of power as such a society only, according to him, can be truly non-violent.

According to Anthony J Parel the metaphor of oceanic circle represent a civic nation and it is also in contrast to the old, hierarchical India. It signifies inclusiveness and Gandhi's notion of state is compatible with the conception of oceanic circle and it is based on the notion of a government based on consent. The state 'would be neither the old Arthashastra type nor the new Hobbesean/Machiavellian type: it would be a constitutionally limited democracy'. It signifies a mixture of the Indian idea of self-rule and the Western idea of representative government.

### ***Concluding Observations***

Critics may point out that Gandhi's notion of oceanic circle presents society as a harmonious whole and thus dissolves and submerges the prevailing 'conflicts'. In addition, it can be argued that in an already unequal society the key quandary is how to bring this conception into practice. These are not entirely unfounded criticisms. However, it can be put forward that, Gandhi is conscious of the fact that this conception is an 'idealised' blueprint - in his words, as eluded above, 'Euclid's point', incapable of being drawn, but of imperishable value. This ideal may not be realisable in its completeness in practice – nevertheless it can point to the direction and work as a compass. Moreover, this idea asks for an engagement at a conceptual plane and should not be understood as a policy statement per se. Further, it has to be appreciated in the wider matrix of other ideas of Gandhi. Another bewilderment, which this conception throws to the political and social theorists is the problem of classification of this idea under the conceptual categories of individual vs. community etc. To this one can submit that it may not always be appropriate and fruitful to evaluate Gandhi's formulations through the lens of categories which lie outside his paradigm.

With these caveats, Gandhi's conception of oceanic circle can be read as part of his endeavour to sculpt and envision an alternative organisation of society. This conception not only makes a departure from some of the fundamental organising principles of modern Western civilisation but is also an attempt to provide an 'idealised' blueprint for societies like India. The idea can be appreciated in contrast with the pyramidal structures fostered by modernity. In this alternative blueprint societal framework – starting from the individual and the village - is envisioned in the form of ever widening, never ascending circle where the outermost circumference of the oceanic circle will not wield power to crush the inner circle. Rather in a mutually interdependent way, the outer circle will give strength to all inner circumferences and will also derive its own strength from the inner ones. The leitmotifs of the scheme of oceanic circle, instead of hierarchy and centralisation, are wide diffusion of power, decentralisation and interdependence. The sovereignty would not be concentrated at one level but shall be diffused horizontally. Power will not only reside in the people but shall also originate from the people. This Gandhian order of society, of course, shall be based on the cardinal

principles of truth and non-violence. This 'ideal' may never be realisable in its entirety but is of imperishable value in context of modernity induced hierarchical and centralised organisation of society.

## Notes and References

1. Parel, Anthony J., "Gandhi and the Emergence of the Modern Indian Political Canon", *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 70, (2008), pp. 40–63.

This paper has focused on the contrasts between modernity induced hierarchal or pyramidal structures. It must be noted here categorically that Gandhi's conception is equally at odds with the old pyramidal ascriptive hierarchies prevailing in Indian society since ages.

2. Terchek, Ronald J., *Gandhi: Struggling for Autonomy*, Vistaar Publications, New Delhi, 1998, p. 78.
3. Pantham, Thomas, 'Gandhi, Nehru, and Modernity', in Upendra Baxi and Bikhu Parekh (eds.) *Crisis and Change in Contemporary India*, Sage, New Delhi, 1995, p. 108-09.
4. Parel, Anthony J. (ed.), *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*, Cambridge, New Delhi, 1997, p xvii.
5. Rudolph, Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph, *Postmodern Gandhi and Other Essays: Gandhi in the World and at Home*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006.
6. Hardiman, David, *Gandhi: In his Time and Ours*, Permanent Black, New Delhi., 2003.

Gandhi was, in his own words, 'humble enough to admit that there is much that we can profitably assimilate from the west. Wisdom is no monopoly of one continent or one race'. He categorically states that his 'resistance to western civilisation is really a resistance to its indiscriminate and thoughtless imitation based on the assumption that Asiatics are fit only to copy everything that comes from the west'. Gandhi, M. K., *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 39, Publication Division, New Delhi, 1999, p. 370, emphasis added.

Some aspects and ideas in the following sections have been reworked and is an extension of author's chapter in Pravin K. Jha (ed.) 'Public Administration', Scholar Tech Press, New Delhi, 2015.

7. Bhikhu Parekh, *Gandhi: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005, p. 78. In the following paragraphs Gandhi's views on modernity are largely derived from the aforesaid text and Parekh, Bhikhu, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy: A Critical Examination*, Macmillan, London, 1989.

See, for instance, Whimster, Sam, *Understanding Weber*, Routledge, New York, 2007, for a survey of the key ideas of Weber.

Though, it must be noted again that Gandhi appreciated many key aspects of the modern/Western civilisation. David Hardiman, for instance, argues that Gandhi 'endorsed many key aspects of this modernity, such as the doctrine of human rights, the fundamental equality of all humans, the right of all to the democratic representation, the principle of governance through persuasion rather than coercion, and so on'. Hardiman, David, *Gandhi: In his Time and Ours*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2003, p. 66.

Gandhi, M. K., *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 91, Publication Division, New Delhi, 1999, p. 326. Emphasis added.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 325.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 326.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 325.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 326.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*

Rudolph, Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph, *Postmodern Gandhi and Other Essays: Gandhi in the World and at Home*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, p. 6.

For a contrast between Gandhi's and Nehru's visions see Chandra, Sudhir, *Gandhi: Ek Asambhav Sambhavana*, (Hindi) (*Gandhi—An Impossible Possibility*), Rajkamal, New Delhi, 2016; Pattanayak, Kishen, *Vikalphiin Nahii Hai Duniya: Sabhyataa, Samaaj aur Buddhijivii kii Sthiti Par Kucch Vichaar* (Hindi) (*Another World Is Possible: Some Thoughts on Civilisation, Society and the State of the*

- Intellectual), Rajkamal, New Delhi, 2000; and Rudolph, Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph, *Postmodern Gandhi and Other Essays: Gandhi in the World and at Home*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006.
16. Gandhi, M. K, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 91, Publication Division, New Delhi, 1999, p. 327.
- On high modernism see Scott, James, *Seeing Like a State: Why Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1998.
17. Diwan, Romesh, 'Economics of Bread Labour' in Romesh Diwan and Mark Lutz (eds.) *Essays in Gandhian Economics*, Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi, 1985, pp. 120-122.
  18. Dasgupta, Ajit K. *Gandhi's Economic Thought*, London: Routledge, 1996, p. 14.
  19. Diwan, Romesh and Mark Lutz (ed.) *Essays in Gandhian Economics*, Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi, 1985, p. 15.
  20. Gandhi, M. K. *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*, Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmadabad, 2008, p. 81.
  21. Gandhi, M. K. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 32., Publication Division, New Delhi, 1999, p. 414.
- Sudheendra Kulkarni has looked at the Gandhi's ideas on technology in the internet age and has persuasively argued that 'the internet - and all other digital era technologies supported by it - have the potential to realise the kernel of what Gandhi had been envisioning to achieve through the spinning wheel'. Kulkarni, Sudheendra, *Music of the Spinning Wheel: Mahatma Gandhi's Manifesto for the Internet Age*, Amaryllis, New Delhi, 2012, p. xix. However, many would not subscribe to Kulkarni's interpretation. Actually, Gandhi's relationship with technology is quite complex. For another innovative reading of Gandhi's ideas on technology in present context see Basole, Amit, 'Gandhian Economics in a Knowledge Society', in Tara Sethia and Anjana Narayan, *The Living Gandhi: Lessons for Our Times*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2013.
22. Hardiman, David, *Gandhi: In his Time and Ours*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2003, p. 72.
  23. Parel, Anthony J. (ed.), *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*, Cambridge, New Delhi, 1997, p. lvii.
  24. Parel, Anthony J., "Gandhi and the Emergence of the Modern Indian Political Canon", *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 70, (2008), pp. 40–63. p. 52-53.