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Europe Seen through the Eyes of a Hinduⁱ

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Abstract. In his way from London to South Africa, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi committed to paper one of his most important and certainly most controversial writings. The book written in 1908 and entitled “Hind Swaraj, or Indian Home Rule”, is a harsh and explicit, outright criticism of the ‘modern civilization’ considered by the Mahatma to be embodied by Europe. What Gandhi is trying to show us in his book is the picture of Europe seen from India, from a different cultural space. He is calling into question the superiority of the European civilization and is trying to stress the risks which are implied in this Western world.

The main goal of the paper is to present the Gandhian way of thinking about the European civilization and try to give an answer to the question as to whether all these ideas written more than 100 years ago have got any relevance for Westerners, for the European man of the 21st century.

Keywords: Gandhi, swaraj, Western civilization, Europe

Short Introduction

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the Mahatma, the Father of India, Gandhiji, Bapu, etc. – a plethora of names pointing at one and the same person, the unmistakable sign of high respect and appreciation in India. Many tend to see the successful lawyer in his person, while many others the freedom fighter. There are some who prefer to highlight his political career. Still others seem to recognize the holy man in Gandhi. Though not large in number, there are some who think of him as Gandhi, the economist. And there persists the view according to which the Great Soul is, above all, a philosopher.

As a matter of fact, it would be quite difficult to argue against any of the observations listed above. All these statements can be easily confirmed if we glance through the almost 50,000-page-long life-work of Gandhi, collected in 100 volumes altogether. And whatever his oeuvre might fail to disclose, history stands witness to it.

A fundamental piece of Gandhi’s life-work is his book entitled “Hind Swaraj, or Indian Home Rule”. In and of itself, this is an essential work from several aspects.

Above all, it is an important creation since this is Gandhi’s very first writing that, on the one hand, outlines the Mahatma’s ideas about how the British colonial rule could be overthrown in India and, on the other hand, provides a clear picture of the kind of India the Mahatma would definitely like to avoid following the declaration of independence. It can be considered kind of guide for the political emancipation of the Indian people and at the same time a political program of the India’s emancipation. The lengthy and detailed description of the new India oftentimes reveals a shocking criticism of the Western civilization embodied in the eyes of Gandhi by Europe. As Anthony J. Parel remarks on his *Editor’s Introduction* to the centenary edition of the book, “*Hind Swaraj* is the seed from which the tree of Gandhian thought has grown to its full stature.” (Parel 2009, xiii)

The importance of the book and its contexts

According to the above mentioned facts, there is no doubt that the book was a very important text in those times when it was written, and I hope that at the end of this paper I will be able to show that actually it remains important in our times too.

But even before getting wrapped up in analysing Gandhi’s thoughts, I deem necessary to introduce the work itself alongside the circumstances and the contexts of its creation.

In the year 1908, the Mahatma leaves for London with a view to entering into negotiations with the British Government in behalf of the Indians living in the Republic of South Africa. We should know that following his years spent in London, where he was reading law, Gandhi returns to India for a little while, where he quickly realizes that he cannot earn his living as a lawyer for a number of reasons. Therefore, at the earliest opportunity, he signs on for a lawyer’s job in South Africa, where he is responsible for managing the legal affairs of a company. This South African ‘intermezzo’, initially planned as a one-year absence, eventually lasted on and on off for twenty years (1893–1914). In a very short period of time, the 24-year-old young lawyer becomes the advocate and (human rights) defender of Indians living and working in the Republic of South Africa – he travels to London in this capacity.

One of the most important questions we can formulate is why he wrote this book? And the answer gave us the Mahatma in the foreword of the *Hind Swaraj*: “I have written because I could not restrain myself.” (Gandhi 1963b, 6)

Committing the book to paper takes place during his ten days' voyage from London to Cape Town, written in Gujarati language, what he would later also translate into English. As he himself relates, during his London stay, he gets into touch with Indians living there, who, being admittedly anarchists, considered violence as the only path of liberating India and putting an end to the British colonial rule. The book itself can be interpreted as a response to this idea. This is how he writes about it:

"I came in contact with every known Indian anarchist in London. Their bravery impressed me, but I felt that their zeal was misguided. I felt that violence was no remedy for India's ills, and that her civilisation required the use of a different and higher weapon for self-protection. The *Satyagraha* of South Africa was still an infant hardly two years old. But it had developed sufficiently to permit me to write of it with some degree of confidence." (Gandhi 2010, 33)

But the "Hind Swaraj, or Indian Home Rule" is much more than a simple response to those people attracted to terrorist attacks and political violence. It is a statement concerning his Swaraj-theory. He wanted to stress that for him the Swaraj is much more than self-government (request for home rule), it means self-rule or in other words the quest for self-improvement. (Parel 2009, xv)

The form and genre of this masterpiece also deserve attention. While glancing through the twenty chapters of the book, one cannot help but recall to mind the Platonic dialogues, which, I must remark, is no accident. Searching through Gandhi's works, we can see that one year before writing his book entitled "Hind Swaraj, or Indian Home Rule" he was already familiar with the Platonic dialogues. These dialogues appear in many of his writings that antedate his works on India's self-governance. Additionally, in his 1924 article published in "Young India" and reporting on the books and authors he had consulted during his terms of imprisonment, Plato's name comes up again. In the chapters of "Hind Swaraj, or Indian Home Rule", the interlocutors are the "Reader" and the "Editor". It is important to note that it is not accidental that the dialogue doesn't happen between a "Guru" and a "Disciple", as we could expect from a Hindu. By the role of the "Reader" and the "Editor" he wants to stress that all the ideas and thoughts stated are open for further discussions. Gandhi states that he was chosen this genre because it considers "the best method of treating difficult subjects." (Gandhi 1963b, 188) While the "Reader" always represents and takes the view of the Indian anarchists met by Gandhi in London, the "Editor" is in fact no one else but the Mahatma himself. Should we group the twenty chapters thematically, it might not be an exaggeration to claim that a significant portion of the chapters deals with the past and present state of affairs in India, numerically followed by the chapters on India's liberation and future. If I had to give a very brief description of the book, I would use the following two statements:

- 1) In and of itself, the work is a harsh criticism, so to say, an all-out condemnation and rejection of civilization in the modern and Western senseⁱⁱ.
- 2) On the other hand, it is perfectly safe to say that the Mahatma was right when recommending his own work as the gospel of love to those interested.

For a proper interpretation and understanding of those described and suggested in the book, a brief digression must be made to touch upon some of the wordings used therein as well as Gandhi's two fundamental postulates.

In Gandhi's life, truth (*satya*) and the love of neighbour play a paramount role. Throughout his teachings, he proclaimed that human life represents a value only if that is entirely built upon truth. And whenever Gandhi speaks of truth, he does not refer to its everyday sense, which is veracity or truthfulness. The Gandhian concept of truth includes true thoughts, speaking the truth, and righteous deeds at the same time (Gandhi 1971, 41-42). He declared with strong conviction that man can only live in harmony with God and himself if there are no contradictions whatsoever between his thoughts, words, and actions. At the same time, he would persistently call attention to the fact that the only path leading to truth, and thus to god, is the one of love. And one of the finest examples in support of his serious intentions behind these statements is related to his very years spent in South Africa. In 1896, following a brief Indian detour, he returns to South Africa alongside his family. Since during his Indian stay he had launched a major propaganda in behalf of the Indian population in South Africa, an enraged company was awaiting him at the port, and the fired up crowd erupted into violence, beating up Gandhi within an inch of his life. Even so, Gandhi decided not to report anyone as he was convinced that the incensed mob had been misled, and once their high mood ebbed away and they came to their senses, their sense of justice would urge them to regret (Gandhi 1970). His position and consistent behaviour did not only have a considerable response among the people but also greatly contributed to his increased prestige and acceptance. In fact, these events can be considered the Mahatma's very first moral victory in his fights against the colonial rule.

Just as in the case of truth (*satya*), *ahimsa* (non-violence) also plays a central role in the Mahatma's life. This category is closely linked with one of Gandhi's fundamental postulates, which says that the liberty of the oppressed must in no way be obtained through violence, by weapons, or by way of bloodshed. Achieving freedom for India can take place in one way only, which is absolute non-violence, the path of peaceful solutions (strikes, protests, hunger-strikes, refusal to cooperate with those in power, boycotts, imprisonments, etc.). It also needs to be stressed that Gandhi thought much more highly of moral fibre as opposed to physical strength. He could accept the use of physical force in one case only: if we are faced with the choice between violence and cowardice.

The other pivotal Gandhian postulate goes into the future of India liberated from the colonial yoke. According to the Mahatma, there is an absolute need for the Indian society to undergo a moral-ethical transformation, an overall process of renewal. This second principle in fact assumes that Gandhi – well acquainted with the Western civilization, way of life, expectations, etc. – actually finds wrong and rejects the traditions thereof, and for a free India he envisages a new

society built on religion and morals. It is also important to underline here that if we come upon the terms “Hind Swaraj or home rule” in the Mahatma’s writings, these do not refer to self-governance in the European sense, the expulsion of the colonial British Empire, or India’s independence, but his references go far beyond them, pointing towards a morally regenerated society made up of spiritually renewed individuals. The constructive agenda set forth by Gandhi was meant to lay the foundations for and build up such a new society (Gandhi 1979).

Concerning the historical and spiritual contexts of the book, it is important to stress that there are several influences to which Gandhi was exposed during his life. First of all we have to mention the years spent in London during his law studies. In these three years the Mahatma get in contact with the Western civilization and way of thought, starts to study the major religions (especially Hinduism, Christianity and Islam) and discovers the writings of Tolstoyⁱⁱⁱ, Ruskin^{iv} or Thoreau^v, authors who had a tremendous influence on his way of thinking.

But at the same time we have to take into account the years Gandhi spent in South Africa which had also a significant impact on his spiritual development. During this period he realise that there is a tight relationship between the colonialism and the modern civilization, that the colonialism could be considered one of the results of modernism. In 1908 in a speech delivered at Johannesburg the Mahatma emphasize for the first time the differences he perceive between Christianity and Western civilization, which can be considered the central thought of Hind Swaraj.

“I do not mix up or confuse western civilization with Christian progress. I decline to believe that it is a symbol of Christian progress that we have covered a large part of the globe with the telegraph system, that we have got telephones and ocean greyhounds, and that we have trains running at a velocity of 50 or even 60 miles per hour. I refuse to believe that all this activity connotes Christian progress, but it does connote western civilization. I think western civilization also represents tremendous activity, eastern civilization represents contemplativeness, but it also sometimes represents lethargy.” (Gandhi 1962, 244)

And finally, we must also speak about the Indian influences on Gandhi, of which the one of the most important could be considered the Surat split of the Indian National Congress in 1907. This controversy was caused by the extreme wing of the Congress becoming stronger and loud and demanding for the achievement of the Swaraj by non-constitutional and non-peaceful means. This ambition was not acceptable by the Apostle of Non-violence. Achieving the Swaraj by brute force and blood was unimaginable to Gandhi, because for him the real Swaraj was much more than simple political power and economic prosperity, for him it meant a necessary moral progression, an ethical evolution among the Indians.

The fundamental ideas of the book and the criticism of the Western civilization

Now let us pass on to the book and the fundamental ideas expounded therein.

The first three chapters of “Hind Swaraj, or Indian Home Rule” have perhaps the least relevance to our topic, as they touch upon the historical past and clarify the place and role of certain actors (the Indian National Congress and its prominent personalities, representatives of the colonial government, etc.). The first discussion relevant to our topic can be found in the fourth chapter, entitled “What Is Swaraj?” – in fact, this is also the point where the dialogue between the “Reader” and the “Editor” becomes interesting.

In this chapter, Gandhi makes it clear that merely expelling the British from India and doing away with colonial rule will not bring along Swaraj for the people of India. If they only expel the British population, the representatives of colonial rule from India, then they have actually done nothing else but give birth to a power without the British, which would further westernize and civilize India. This way, as a direct future consequence, in a few years’ time, there will not be any mention of Hindustan, but instead Englستان will be the new name given to the country. And this is not the kind of self-governance Gandhi has meant to attain. Therefore, he considers extremely important that, besides the English, their exported political, economic, and social forms, institutions, and services be done away with as well, such as the Parliament, large factories, modern medical services of the western type, the British administration of justice and all of its pertaining institutions, etc. (Gandhi 2010).

This latter statement actually launches forth Gandhi’s criticism of the West. First of all, he puts the Parliament under a microscope, and considers it an unnecessary institution whose members are usually voted by constituents who in most cases do not make decisions based on their knowledge of a given political agenda but their ideological and party preferences are the major guidelines in casting their votes. At the same time, Gandhi also calls attention to the fact that the members of the Parliament are selfish and they pursue individual interests. In the Parliament, public welfare never emerges a winner but majority party interests always come in first. Gandhi regards the institution itself as “the talking shop of the world” (Gandhi 1963b, 17), “a costly toy of the nation” (Gandhi 1963b: 17).

According to Gandhi, all of these can be attributed to modern civilization, which he considers merely a nominal civilization, as we can see that the peoples and “nations of Europe are becoming degraded and ruined day by day” under its influence (Gandhi 1963b, 18). It is Gandhi’s strong belief that what we view today as European/Western civilization has entirely detached itself from morality and religion (we must note that these are tightly connected in the Gandhian sense, functioning as quasi-interchangeable terms), and its sole purpose is to provide full-scale services improving people’s physical well-being. And while enjoying a sense of freedom within the confines of modern civilization, they do not even realize that somewhere along the way they have actually become enslaved to money and

whatever luxury items money can buy. According to Gandhi, “[t]his civilization is such that one has only to be patient and it will be self-destroyed. (Gandhi 1963b, 21).

Gandhi has been careful to point out as well that the British colonial rule is not so much the real danger for India but rather the modern civilization it has brought along. To his mind, the biggest threat to India is that its nations will turn away from God, and it will lose its religion(s). While every religion teaches us that all worldly things are transient and they deserve no attention, thus curbing our worldly ambitions, the emergence of the Western civilization’s achievements yields quite opposite results. The advent of the railway has greatly contributed to the desecration of holy sites in India and the perpetuation of the British rule. Whereas in olden times the visiting of shrines amounted to a veritable ordeal, this poses no particular challenge anymore, and so, besides the flood of pilgrims, these sacred places have gradually started to lure pickpockets and bandits. By the same token, railways have put an end to natural isolation, a factor making its contribution to the spread of famine. The onetime small self-sustaining communities underlying society have become almost unheard-of in today’s India. Now if someone produces excess, he will try to convert it into money at the best price possible, in which the seller is largely helped by the convenience of this new means of transport to get his commodities to more remote markets.

He takes a similar view of the British administration of justice, which he holds to be teaching immorality and exposing people to temptations difficult to get rid of. The ultimate purpose of a lawyer is their client’s patronage, for which they are willing to take the path of immorality if their clients’ interest dictates so. Furthermore, Gandhi does not fail to draw attention to the fact that while, on the face of it, lawyers make every effort to help someone out of misery, they are in fact busy getting rich themselves. There is no other reasonable way to account for the lawyers’ higher salaries compared to other segments and professions of society. Taking full advantage of their special status created by the Western civilization, they exploit it for their personal enrichment.

Upon perusing the lines criticizing modern jurisdiction, these fragments of the work under our analysis give us the impression that Gandhi was an advocate of direct negotiation and mediation, even if we cannot find this explicitly mentioned. He was fully convinced that any conflict can be truly and definitely resolved only if the people involved are trying to resolve it among themselves. Any decision imposed on the conflicting parties may serve as the starting-point of further conflicts.

In his criticism of the West, the Mahatma does not forget to include doctors and medical science. He believes that modern medicine has paid an enormous contribution to people becoming excessive in many ways. Gandhi sets out from the assumption that the majority of diseases are the outcomes of our negligence and that we do not pay proper attention to our way of life and dietary habits, disrupting the internal harmony of the body. If, for instance, someone spoils his digestion as a consequence of malnutrition, the doctor will prescribe certain medications to heal the stomach. In this way, however, the person will end up again being careless about what and how much he eats as he is confident that the same medication will help him recover several times if necessary. Whereas if this convenient solution were not within our grasp, we would probably pay a lot more attention to our eating habits.

Reading these lines from Gandhi might even sound ridiculous at first, but if we examine them in the context of Gandhian thinking all of it will become much clearer right away. Indeed, since the Mahatma strongly believed in the utmost importance of curbing the senses, fasting, and allegiance to the purity pledge known as the brahmacharya^{vi} vow, as all these contribute to people getting to know themselves and their limits while also helping them build character. This is how he speaks of this matter in his autobiography: “Brahmacharya means control of the senses in thought, word and deed.” (Gandhi 1970, 170).

Machines could not be excluded either from his list of criticized Western achievements and (side-)effects. If Gandhi has ever been criticized for any of his ideas, then it happened most of all owing to his anti-machine views outlined in his book. Gandhi claims that machines are to be held responsible for India having been driven into deep poverty and the very same machines will make Europe, too, a bleak place, a workaday world to live in. Machines, one of the greatest achievements and symbols of modern civilization, do not impress Gandhi at all, which I think has basically three reasons. First, these inventions make respect and recognition of physical work disappear, leading again to the devaluation of man himself. Further, the Second Industrial Revolution taking place at the end of the 18th century completely brought to its knees the Indian manufactories, the craft sector and significantly affected the cultivation of industrial crops as well. Finally, Gandhi could aptly anticipate the enhanced market competition and the polarization of society, both driven by the emergence of machines, a condition that makes for the fast-paced appearance of an economic elite able and ready to rise above the other sections of society, considering their more expanded range of financial possibilities at hand. But this is in full contradiction with the sarvodaya propagated by Gandhi, which is universal human well-being. As the Mahatma set out: “It would be folly to assume that an Indian Rockefeller would be better than the American Rockefeller.” (Gandhi 1963b, 58).

At the same time, Gandhi is fully aware that the already existing factories cannot be destroyed or pulled down, and not all the machines have negative effects, and so he has found a reasonable middle ground in urging India to keep their numbers as low as possible. In a discussion with Gandhi, Ramachandran is asking him that is he against all the machinery. In his reply, Bapu highlights that he does not raise his voice against machines, but opposes excessive and unconditional insistence to machines.

“How can I be when I know that even this body is a most delicate piece of machinery? The spinning-wheel itself is a machine; a little tooth-pick is a machine. What I object to, is the *craze* for machinery, not machinery as such. The craze is

for what they call labour-saving machinery. Men go on 'saving labour' till thousands are without work and thrown on the open streets to die of starvation. I want to save time and labour, not for a fraction of mankind, but for all. I want the concentration of wealth, not in the hands of a few, but in the hands of all. Today machinery merely helps a few to ride on the backs of millions. The impetus behind it all is not the philanthropy to save labour, but greed. It is against this constitution of things that I am fighting with all my might." (Gandhi 1967, 250–251)

Simultaneously to his fight against the abuse of the machines, he launches the "Charkha Movement" (spinning wheel) conveying a double message: let us give up on the textile goods and articles of clothing coming from Great Britain, and let every household in India have a spinning wheel the family will use to produce the textile materials necessary for their own clothing. He himself has set a good example, manufacturing the necessary material for his garment on his own charkha. The movement turned into such a success that the spinning wheel has become one of the national symbols of India, even making its way to the national flag between 1921 and 1947.

Following a considerably harsh criticism of the Western civilization, Gandhi goes on to speak of the real civilization too. He considers Indian civilization as the only true civilization in the world since this is the sole remaining pre-civilization. Rome and the Greek civilization are long gone, the civilization of the pharaonic Egypt survives in museums and artefacts alone, and China is apparently on its way to break with its thousand-year-old culture. And amidst all this the Indian civilization is thriving, which in Gandhi's interpretation means that it has a *raison d'être*.

Now let us have a look at what Gandhi actually means by civilization. In his view, civilization is nothing else but 'that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty' (Gandhi 1963b, 37; Gandhi 2010, 104). And a man's duty cannot be other than maintaining morality, that is to say, to be in control of his intellect and bridle his passions. This is the surest way to self-exploration. However, the Gandhian perception of civilization reserves no place for well-being and living standards. Gandhi truly believed that happiness is a mental state, which also implies that it is not dependent on the circumstances but is rather the outcome of man's inner harmony. "A man is not necessarily happy because he is rich, or unhappy because he is poor. The rich are often seen to be unhappy, the poor to be happy." – Gandhi argues (Gandhi 1963b, 37; Gandhi 2010, 104).

The Mahatma has taken great care to underline that although the majority of Indian people do not lead a life of luxury and do not live hedonistic life, this does not presuppose an unhappy existence. Indeed, the fact that till British colonization came along India could settle for a lower level of advanced civilization in the Western sense, with no large cities, market competition, machines, and factories, does not mean that the people of India had not been happy. India had agronomists and craftsmen, artisans, courts and doctors, who were all well aware that these professions are not superior to the rest and their duty is to be at the people's service.

Although no civilization in our world has ever reached perfection, there is a fundamental difference between the Western and the Indian civilization: while the Indian civilization makes every effort to lift up the moral being, the Western one appears to consider the promotion of immorality as one of its top priorities – Gandhi contends (Gandhi 2009).

Conclusions

I believe it has become clear from the above lines that Gandhi's criticism of the West is in tight connection with the concept and idea of morality. For him, morality is the only consideration – as he admits it in his writings: he is a Hindu, a Muslim, a Christian, and a Jew at the same time because there is only one religion in his eyes, the religion of morality (Gandhi 1983a, 41; Gandhi 1983b, 180). In Gandhi's perception, morality overwrites everything else!

With reference to morals and immorality as well as God and Mammon, he speaks his mind on several occasions about the relationship between Jesus' teaching and the Western civilization, and observes that the Western man has left the straight and narrow path of the Christian teachings, and placed his whole life under money, wealth, and power, acting totally oblivious of Christ's principles and living a life unworthy of a Christian (Gandhi 1963a, 160; Gandhi 1965, 235; Gandhi 1969, 248).

Despite that his criticism of the West put forward in his book entitled "Hind Swaraj, or Indian Home Rule" might come across as naïve or, in many cases, utopian, I believe that Gandhi was one of the prominent thinkers of his time. It is essential to bear in mind that when reading through these lines in the book we should place his ideas into the historical context where they belong, interpret them accordingly, and do not tear them away from the cultural setting Gandhi himself was part of. If this is how we read and interpret the Mahatma's lines committed to paper, they will convey an entirely different message rather than when looking at them through the glasses of the Western historiography and civilization. In this case we will realize that simplifying the book's message to the conclusion that Gandhi was a major opponent of Western civilization with its all advantages and disadvantages, it is simply false. It is much more appropriate to say that the Mahatma opposed to those "achievements", tendencies and trends of the Western civilization which are incompatible and irreconcilable with the values of traditional Indian civilization. "We must have industry, but of the right kind" – declares Gandhi in one of his writings. (Gandhi 1962, 374)

Regarding his criticism it is important to emphasize that its background is free of religious doctrines or political ideologies, has nothing to do with early anti-colonial or nationalist movements. His position concerning the Western civilization stands above all these, and can be perceived as the phrasing of the highest moral value.

It is, however, common ground that in some cases the ideas outlined by Gandhi are very much forward-looking. As already mentioned, instead of the European jurisdiction, he looked at mediation as an efficient tool of conflict

management, which would later on enter a new golden age in Europe too. Also, in the Gandhian thinking, we can find concrete – even if not literal – references to sustainable development and ecological footprint. When Gandhi is speaking of self-sustainable society and universal well-being (sarvodaya), he somewhat foreshadows the issues of sustainable development and sustainable land (swadeshi as home economy), though, of course, using the knowledge and terminology of the early 1900s. If we investigate the concept and relationship of self-governance (swaraj) and universal well-being (sarvodaya) or study Gandhi's theory on the role of the state and the relations between state and citizen, then we will come across the today so trendy "good governance", i.e. his ideas on the state as provider, a very hot research topic at the turn of the 21st century.

Finally, let me conclude my paper with a plastic image: it is my firm belief that even though many of us may find the ideas unveiled by Gandhi a distorting mirror, it is still worthwhile to look into this slightly distorting mirror, and draw whatever conclusions are appropriate, as I am rather sure that some of his critical views are well worth considering in the 21st century too, and taken to heart for the sake of our own future.

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Short bio-note

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His fields of interest include: Asian religions, the Gandhian political philosophy, economic thought and non-violence theory, security studies and geopolitics.

He is external member of the public body of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, member of several professional organizations and NGO-s.

He is married and father of three boys, Dávid (13), Bence (11) and Tamás (8). His hobbies are travelling, reading and cars.

ⁱ The participation at the conference was made possible by the Communitas Foundation.

ⁱⁱ When Gandhi talks about the modern or Western civilization (for Gandhi these terms are synonyms in the most cases), he refers to a “mode of conduct” which has its roots in the Industrial Revolution (Parel 2009, xviii). The Mahatma wrote in 1908: “Let it be remembered that western civilization is only a hundred years old, or to be more precise, fifty.” (Gandhi 1962, 374) For him the Industrial Revolution wasn’t a simple change in the production processes. He considers that this process generated a new lifestyle (liberalism) which has definitely changed the relationship between the individual and nature, between the man and religion, man and ethics or man and politics. In this new vision the nature is considered an autonomous entity which has its own rules and which has to be conquered by the man in order to be able to satisfy his own needs, desires and political ambitions. The declared goal of the politics could be considered the economic prosperity and the welfare of the society. In this secularized world the religion has lost his importance and became secondary.

ⁱⁱⁱ Lev Tolstoy (1828–1910), Russian writer, thinker. Thanks to Tolstoy’s “The Kingdom of God is Within You” Gandhi refers to the Christian religion as an ethical system which is built on the “Sermon on the Mount”. According to Tolstoy’s interpretation, the “Sermon on the Mount” could be considered the “doctrine of the non-violence and the ultimacy of the conscience” (Parel 2009, xxxvi). Even his opposition to the Western civilization and anti-colonial behaviour can be tracked back to Tolstoy. According to him, the Western world can be described by the exploitation of the working class, the contempt of the ploughman and an increasing consumer behaviour, which are considered the signs and traits of modernism. And do not forget that in his letter addressed to Gandhi, Tolstoy emphasizes that India was not colonized by the British, but the Indians themselves when they “recognised, and still recognise, force as the fundamental principle of social order” (Parel 2009, xxxix).

^{iv} John Ruskin (1819–1900), English art critique, social thinker and philanthropist. For Gandhi Ruskin’s most influential work was “Unto This Last”. In his autobiography, he confess as follows:

“The teachings of Unto This Last I understood to be:

1. That the good of the individual is contained in the good of all.
2. That a lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's inasmuch as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work.
3. That a life of labour, i.e., the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman is the life worth living.

The first of these I knew. The second I had dimly realized. The third had never occurred to me. Unto This Last made it as clear as daylight for me that the second and the third were contained in the first. I arose with the dawn, ready to reduce these principles to practice.” (Gandhi 1970, 239)

Ruskin considers that the fundamental doctrine of the new political economy is wrong when it considers that it is more important the luxury of the few than the basic needs of the masses. As Parel quotes Ruskin,

“(…) as long as as long as there are cold and nakedness in the land around you, so long there can be no question at all but that splendour of dress is a crime. In due time, when we have nothing better to set people to work at, it may be right to let them make lace and cut jewels; but as long as there are any who have no blankets for their beds, and no rags for their bodies, so long it is blanket-making and tailoring we must set people to work at—not lace.” (Parel 2009, xl).

^v Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862), American essayist, historian and philosopher. In a lecture delivered in 1847, Thoreau said that the best government is which governs least and the ideal government will be which not governs at all. (Thoreau 2008, 5). These ideas were used by Gandhi in his constructive programme when he tried to draw up the basics of his economic philosophy called *sarvodaya*.

^{vi} Strictly speaking and taken literally, the term is to be understood as ‘a lifestyle, or attitude that is conducive to finding god’. In Hinduism, however, according to the Vedic traditions, it is a term adopted to denominate a Hindu man’s first stage of life. As per the Vedic traditions, a young Hindu man’s first stage of life has to be about their preparation for adult life, thus having to abstain from any kind of sexual activity. In present-day India, this term is used in a much broader sense, including everyone who lives a continent way of life, regardless of age or gender.