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GANDHI AND MALLIK: NONVIOLENCE AND ABSTENTION AS ETHICAL STRATEGIES FOR A PEACEFUL WORLD

MADHURI SANTANAM SONDI

The Roman two-headed god Janus some decades ago might have been construed as personifying the paradox of tradition and modernity. Modernity was optimistically understood as constituting whatever was forward-looking and progressive, with its origins somewhere in the past few European centuries, and the ‘pre-modern’ was even described as ‘pre-historic’. Since the future was in some sense already with us, the effort was to align both the Janus heads by forcible marches towards the ‘end of history’. But the subsequent denouement of the Eurocentric Enlightenment paradigm initiated a discourse on post-modern multi-culturalism that bypasses notions of deterministic linear evolution. Gazing into the future with Janus, therefore, and scanning the flow of past events for constant indices, one may have one’s vision enlarged by various pasts and various futures. Janus stands or stood in gates and doorways, on the thresholds of the present - that thin almost evanescent constantly moving line that separates the two time dimensions. The present is lived through, nourished by the past and inspired by the future, on the way from yesterday to tomorrow. Only the mystics aim to experience the Present in itself, in a space of existential a-temporality. Historians are more indulgent: for them the present may be an ‘era’ lasting decades or even a century, depending on the endurance over time of a perceived continuity in a system or order of things.

Within the dimensions provided by these mythological, historical and philosophical definitions one may examine the peace thinking of Gandhi and Mallik, who combed tradition and history for lessons on conflict, and peace and the (ethically) good life. Neither confined their analyses to strategic conditions of war and peace, but contexted their arguments within a wider civilizational perspective, embracing ethics, socio-political organisation and culture. They ‘saw’ a peaceful global future, but also spelt out, importantly, new techniques for reaching there.

Before examining their particular ideas, it might be useful to examine some current notions of the desirability and possibility of a ‘culture of peace’.
A. Lessons from Janus: is a peaceful world possible or desirable?

Looking backwards one finds that war has been a ubiquitous phenomenon throughout history, and political theorists like Clausewitz or Carl Schmitt have made it an integral part of political theory. Some social scientists also suggest that conflict, whether as war or civic contention, is a psychological and social necessity, or, as Simmel observes, ‘a form of socialization’. War or armed conflict alternates with another social necessity – periods of peace and nonviolence, which require no justification and are construed as normal. The realists emphasise that given the cast of human nature, both war and peace are normal and necessary for survival and social health. What is undesirable is continuous war or continuous peace. Since, therefore, peace and conflict are alternating and mutually implicatory phases of a certain social dynamics, the one cannot be a solution for the other. Although purportedly descriptive, this statement carries a desideratum of ‘social health’. Whether or not this is a sound pathology of health, and whether or not mere health is an end in itself, is not of much concern to the realist.

A popular myth has it that the armaments industry is a major obstacle to bringing about international peace. It assumes that cessation of arms production will reduce if not eliminate the likelihood of war, and furthermore release large sums of money for diversion to more ‘innocent’ or socially useful pursuits. However, although war and armaments appear to be locked in a vicious spiral, it would not be incorrect to ascribe primacy to anticipation of conflict, arising from fear of hostilities or from expansionist aims. These will not disappear with simple disarmament. Armaments and economics also display an almost symbiotic connection, and the collapse of one may well impinge adversely on the other, especially in the short run. Furthermore, power and domination games can be played without open violence, indeed they characterize the competitive society. Faulty socio-political environments are almost incurable according to the present state of knowledge about human nature and society, where conditions for inequality, unfreedom and suffering constitute a threatening and inflammable tinder-box.

Again we have seen how hopes were dashed with the much-anticipated Peace Dividend that was to accrue with the end of the Cold War through diversion of monies from armaments to developmental projects. In fact munitions factories have no more closed down with the exit of the Evil Empire than has NATO wound down with the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. To convert a war economy into a peace economy would require a massive conceptual and societal overhaul – and
few economists have thought seriously about it, although thinkers like Gandhi, Mallik and Immanuel Kant emphasized the need for doing so.

The latest approach to international peace derives from a study covering the last two hundred years that indicates that democracies have not gone to war with one another. (This is still a contested study, but has been influential in altering the terms of debate.) Here Janus’ backward look displays a greater discrimination. Democracies war with authoritarian, military or totalitarian regimes, but not with one another. Therefore a peaceful world demands that all nations adopt democracy as their socio-political system. This is a development from Kant’s notion in *On Perpetual Peace* that republican societies will not fight with one another—the shared assumption being that, given the choice, common people prefer peace. A people’s vote will always be pacific. Of course Kant was proven wrong in that a populace can be roused into a state of bellicosity through jingoistic arguments couched in threatening terms of losing one’s hearth or subduing an evil ‘other’. Hence the current refinement that democracies (stringently defined) do not fight each other, but may be energized to deal with the representatives of Satan. There have of course been protests from various Asian countries that democracy as defined in the western mode with intrinsic foundations in human rights, pluralism, civic society and representative government is not a universally valid form of political organisation. An important, sometimes unstated, ingredient in the peaceful democratic ideal is the free market, indicating a consumer society that spends its energies in chasing material goods and has no inclination to risk life in pursuit of ideological or principled aims. In sum, affluent people are too self-centred to make war. This thesis can only be conclusively proven or tested if and when the whole world goes democratic and rich. Inequality does not promote peace.

It is interesting also to investigate the fears relating to the possibility of an unprecedented condition of continuous or stable peace. It is suggested that if war is an acknowledged evil, *untrammeled peace too has its hidden dangers*. This is not simply the eternal boredom or quiescence associated with popular notions of Heaven. Since stable peace is against nature as we have understood it up to now, it may well unfold an unpredictable problematic, just as any scientific experiment, which radically interferes with or acts into nature, sets into motion unforeseeable, sometimes uncontrollable and irreversible effects. Conditions of stable peace have never prevailed, their pathology is unknown and unimaginable, and it is unscientific to extrapolate desires from a particular human condition onto an unknown situation. It is more scientific to
apprehend that human nature with its propensities for both good and evil will continue to create suffering, even if it abandons war. In other words, peace by itself is not an ultimate value.

However, the idea of history as political progress does not easily leave us, and the change of century has given it a fillip. Unlike Benjamin's Angel of History, swept backwards into the future by winds of change, gazing at a past constituted by an ever mounting pile of rubble, Janus stands firmly on the ground, his gaze serenely fixed on past and future, suggesting possibilities for human understanding, vision and action. A visionary is not confined by the strict rules of scientific procedures, but has the freedom to make intelligent, even inspired proclamations about the future. An ethical and optimistic component is integral to his projections, (prophetic Cassandras do not qualify as visionaries) and in this sense, the aspiration for peace embodies the hope of the socio-ethical overcoming the political.

World peace is an idea that had its origin in the seventeenth century in Europe after the calamitous Thirty Years War. By the twentieth century, one of the bloodiest in world history, war had demonstrated a tiresome persistence, which provoked Leo Strauss to write:

> A fundamental transformation has occurred, not in the fact that men quarrel but in what they quarrel about. What men quarrel about depends on what is considered important, authoritative. Different things are considered authoritative in different centuries; in the sixteenth century, theology was authoritative; in the seventeenth, metaphysics; in the eighteenth, morals; in the nineteenth, the economy; and in the twentieth, technology....

Yet war continues to be associated with its Siamese twin, the desire for peace, to which modern weapons of mass destruction with their threat to the continuance of life on earth, have given an added edge. The twentieth century, despite its horrendous war record, also saw the birth of arresting peace movements, peace activism and peace thinking which have given pause to think. Their limited success suggests that peace awaits a more sophisticated analysis: as an object of serious study it has yet to receive the same attention (conceptual and financial) as war, violence, strategy or weapons development.

Regardless of whatever utility they may have possessed in the past, it is salutary to remember that wars do not culminate in stable victories.
If there are going to be negative consequences from peace, for many it would be a risk worth taking, for the known consequences of war have become too appalling. Human needs, material, psychological and spiritual are hardly understandable in their full complexity, hence rarely predictable in their entirety. So the lesson from Janus' backward look is that given the awesome technological advances in the manufacture of weapons of mass destruction, and the interdependence and interconnectedness of the inhabitants of this planet, avoidance of war and violence have become important and necessary intermediate ends. The intermediate end is survival. This keeps open the critique regarding the nature or configuration of stable peace.

As an essentially contested concept, peace attracts a certain amount of cognitive dissonance. Rather than simple absence of wars, Mallik defines peace as absence of conflicts: the former is a more acute expression of the latter. An imposed peace in the sense of Pax, conditions of structural violence, political and cultural domination or expansion, economic or ideological control, is not viable on a long-term basis. Internalised discontents may erupt into overt violence that may further escalate into war, terrorism or genocide. Today, controlled conflicts and contained injustices are a luxury we cannot afford. Also, to be effective, peace needs to be globalised as much as the economy – we cannot have peace in parts. World peace may seem a tall order, but from a logical and holistic viewpoint it has no alternative.

Furthermore, the question of values never leaves us: it became unfashionable to talk of morals or norms when modernity was in its iconoclastic phase, when the 'free' individual was exalted almost above all norms as the pinnacle of evolutionary achievement. With time, however, individual freedom as submerged or manipulated in social, industrial, economic and organizational processes has become highly problematic, and today survives mostly as a cluster of sensuous preferences and congenital drives. This is part of the crisis of modernity. Society as we know it cannot survive without norms and values, and most humans cannot shed the craving for integrity and ego-transcendence that give dignity and worth to human life. In this respect also, since war brutalizes both the perpetrator and the victim, there can be no escape from peace thinking as an offshoot of a moral discourse.

In this context one may look at two important and innovative Indians of this century, who made substantial contributions to the theme. Mahatma Gandhi as a nonviolentist and moralist needs no introduction. Mallik's more academic philosophic thinking about the condi-
tions for global peace through an ethics of abstention also has important practical consequences.

B. The dimensions of Gandhian nonviolence

Gandhi’s nonviolence grew out of an assiduous moral quest for truth – he records in his Autobiography that his reflections on right conduct led him inexorably to *ahimsa*. Nonviolence today is not such an unfamiliar concept as it was when he first formulated it, if only because international actors like Martin Luther King and Lech Walesa have successfully carried forward the Gandhian experiment which might otherwise have been dismissed as a peculiarly “ethnic” phenomenon. Such experiments have been intellectually underscored by philosophers and political scientists like Joan Bondurant or Gene Sharp, whose analysis of the methods and techniques of nonviolence have further strengthened its appeal and credibility to people outside the land of its origin.

Gandhi’s nonviolence spiritually derived from Hindu and Jain sources, but he saw in it a universal truth, implicit or explicit in all ethical modes of thought or prevailing belief-systems. The histories of many societies include instances of nonviolent movements, though perhaps not on the scale tried by Gandhi. There is a relationship between peace and nonviolence, but the two are not equivalent. A peaceful situation is necessarily nonviolent, but not always vice versa. Philosophically, Gandhi regards nonviolence (not peace as absence of conflict, but certainly peace as absence of violence) as the societal norm. Violence according to him is a social aberration and interrupts the habitual and natural rhythm of life. Obviously his understanding of ‘normal’ social life is different from that of a Simmel or a Coser. But he would not hesitate to apply this evaluation to history also, in that his guess would be that periods of peace or non-war are more ‘normal’ or enduring than episodes of violent conflict in any particular society. Moreover, in his reading, history shows a movement away from one-time sanctioned forms of violence. Witch-burning or *sati*, for example, is today considered not only unlawful but an intolerable act of barbarism. He presumed that several other forms of violence, even those tolerated by the state, would gradually move into the historical dustbin of discarded superstitions.

In this spirit Gandhi undertook to transform violent forms of political change or revolution into nonviolent ones. As a realist - Janus’ backward looks are generally conducive to realism - he understood that
humankind is not poised for a sudden and global somersault into peace or sanity, but as an evolutionist he saw the possibilities of engendering a culture of nonviolence out of the tendencies that already existed.

Gandhi's own innovation, principled nonviolence, is a technique of political struggle that deliberately challenges authority and demands justice. It is different from habitual or pragmatic or timorous avoidance of violence. Nonviolence is principled where a violent response would be 'natural', possible and condoned. The weak or unarmed person's discretion (as opposed to valour) is not born of principled nonviolence, though were he to display a readiness to court physical danger without self-defense it would be nearer the goal. Principled nonviolence is conducted in an open defiance of political authority or social institutions to demand justice or restitution of rights. It carries a commitment not to hurt the antagonist or oppressor, along with a willingness to suffer physical harm if necessary. To allow oneself to be physically attacked or insulted or imprisoned without protest or retaliation requires as much nerve and determination as any form of physical combat. Like the latter also, it requires intense and thorough training – perhaps more, since a major reorientation of the personality and a defiance of convention is involved.

As an integral part of an ethical program, it must be also stressed that nonviolence entails respect for the other, and a belief in the other's moral nature. Gandhi and Martin Luther King from the depths of their religious convictions insisted on love for the other as conditional for the practice of nonviolence, but respect for all may be more practicable. Nonviolence assumes a shared moral ground between all disputants, be they religious believers, agnostics or atheists. It also assumes that but for certain exceptions, the average person or nearly all human beings have a moral nature which must be respected and a conscience to which others can appeal. Operationally, therefore, nonviolence is to be conducted in a manner that allows an ethical debate to unfold.

A common objection to nonviolence is that it can only be practised against an opponent who displays a minimum of moral sense and humanity. In other words, it challenges the assumption that the average human being necessarily has a moral nature. The counterfactual problem that Gandhi himself faced was that although his nonviolent struggles led to the mobilisation of the Indian masses against the British Raj, contributing substantially to its ultimate withdrawal, they failed conspicuously on the Hindu-Muslim front (with some brilliant exceptions like Khan Abdul Ghafar Khan's Khudai Khidmadgars). The real poser
for Gandhians is what went wrong in this case, where nonviolence was actually tried and found wanting. Gandhi pinned the blame for the partition carnage on the inadequate preparation of the Indian public for nonviolence, an inadequacy for which he held his own leadership responsible, but he clung, nevertheless, to nonviolence as a general principle. The public drew different conclusions, that nonviolence was impractical and unworkable. The Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs, heralding a quantum leap in horrific forms of death and destruction, also stunned Gandhi for some time, radically challenging as they did his thesis of evolutionary nonviolence, but in the end his convictions were not unsettled. He continued to believe in the ultimate triumph of man’s higher nature.

Today, although belief in the efficacy of violence, implicit or explicit, still dominates political thinking, for some even defines it, its legitimacy has in fact been seriously challenged. Gandhi demonstrated that it was possible to successfully utilise nonviolence as a means of social and political change, even though it may not succeed in all areas all at once. It is still a matter of debate as to whether nonviolence is universalisable or feasible in all conditions of extreme conflict or oppression, but it has certainly been established that nonviolence is a practical, efficient and humane technique in many more instances than were earlier deemed possible.

There was a second foundation to Gandhi’s vision of nonviolence, and that is the establishment of a moral and nonviolent society that reduces the provocations to violence. This, according to him, requires a comprehensive agenda involving education, adequate economic social and political structures, appropriate lifestyles et al, mediated through a strongly developed sense of ethics and responsibility. Any form of social organisation without a moral vivifying breath would lapse into authoritarian or totalitarian structures if not anarchy. In this sense, of laying the foundations of a society oriented towards conditions of mutual care and responsibility, Gandhi is equally if not more relevant to the future.

Gandhi’s prescriptions for a nonviolent society have been spelt out in some detail in this writer’s Modernity. Morality and the Mahatma. Based on norms of human dignity and mutual responsibility, it envisaged a network of communities governed by a chosen life-style of non-acquisitiveness, controlled consumerism, self-management, minimum government, non-centralized politics, and localized economies anchored in catering to the needs of the least. These would be main-
tained by appropriate formal and informal education that would also inculcate the requisite social and personal norms. He believed small groups to be the most socially efficient units, where face-to-face living enables moral discourse, genuinely participative politics, effective satyagrahas (nonviolent action) when necessary, and awareness of and attendance to the needs of all constituents. What all this presumed, for which he has been castigated by modernisers both within and outside India, is a brake on industrialisation and consumerism. Although his scheme was anchored in the moral persona of the individual, it was in total opposition to the individualism anchored in freedom as understood in the modern west. Not surprisingly, therefore, he tends to be dismissed as anachronistic – except for the fact that now certain developments of modernity have become problematic. Over-heated economies, over-industrialisation with its baneful effects on the human and natural environment, doubts about sustainable production, social anomie and chaos, appear insoluble within the logic of modernity, and return us to the relevance of the Mahatma’s critique, even though his specific remedies may no longer be feasible.

Gandhi never presumed that he had the recipe for the perfect society: he was aware that rooting out injustice and inequality, apart from sheer deficiencies in human character, are Herculean tasks. But he firmly believed that to a large extent an appropriate social ambience and proper education could produce a more equitable, humane and responsible society. He did not anticipate the complete disappearance of human disagreements and injustices, but trusted to social structures and nonviolent methods to manage them, supplemented where necessary, by the policing, judicial and defensive functions of the state.

He also believed, some historians would say wrongly, that such a peaceful society had existed in the villages of India - it was a historical phenomenon, and with suitable modifications, could be restored to its full potential. In this sense he was a true Janus, using the past to model the future. He also hoped that once achieved, the essential ingredients of India’s peaceful society could provide a model for others, and thereby generate worldwide peace and cooperative existence. Hence his insistence on starting reforms with one’s immediate neighbourhood rather than with world peace as such.

He never had a chance to put his theories to the test. Free India’s politicians and statesmen did not see eye to eye with him on his plan for a country of village republics with sustainable economies built on restrained consumerism, and so Gandhi’s reforms were never tried out
on a national scale. Rather, as heavily prejudiced against industrialisation and urbanization, they drew fierce criticism from modernisers, whether of the capitalist or communist variety. Several of Gandhi’s controversial prescriptions have in any case been overtaken by events, but his attempt to build an ethically driven responsible and peaceable society remains valid despite the altered context in which we live.

Nonviolence, therefore, as understood by Gandhi both as a means of struggle, as a principle for socio-economic and political organisation, and as an affirmation of human dignity still has much to engage us in coming times. For this of course, the language of human rights by itself is not enough: not the state but the human community must care for its own through cultivating mutual responsibility and care. One of Gandhi’s well-known metaphors spoke of the concentric circles of human responsibility, spreading outwards from the individual to family, clan and district, and beyond to yet larger social and political frontiers. Ideally, perhaps, like the creator Brahma, Janus should have four heads gazing in all directions.

C. Cultural pluralism and Mallik’s ethics of abstention.

The notion of cultural pluralism has become fairly commonplace, though its political and social implications contain several gray areas. Does cultural relativism conceal a hidden belief in one's own superiority? Is relativism a retreat from responsible involvement in the world? Partly these problems arise out of a simplistic or vulgar relativism, which Mallik answers through a philosophical basis for a responsible pluralism founded in a rigorous sense of equality between individuals and groups. I have elsewhere written in more detail about his theory of individuals and his analysis of societal conflict. For Mallik individuals constitute the concrete stuff of Reality, and are essentially related to one another. Western individualism emphasizes the freedom of independent individuals, Mallik’s relationism defines them as ineluctably related – and that is the basis of both sociation and ethics. Different cultures and societies may differ as to how to define that relationship – but the fact of relationship is an integral aspect of multiplicity. A brief recapitulation of Mallik’s account of the compulsions for conflict in and between social organisations may be in order. In so far as these constitute received ways of thought and action, they constitute the landscape for Janus’ backward gaze.

Mallik starts with the problem of social organisation, defined as one of ordering individuals in groups. Individuals are distinguishable by
their differences but share much in common as social beings: how to create a social order that accommodates both differences and agreements in a functional way? No society can abolish either category, nor apportion them equal emphasis. The former is unrealistic, the latter non-functional, so all that can be done is to accent one or the other value. This produces what Mallik describes as a ‘ramshackle duality’, an inherently unstable social organisation tending towards disequilibrium.

He identifies three kinds of value-accenting systems, which lie at the basis of three major types of social organisation. One allocates importance to differences over agreements: such societies emphasize individual rights, opinions, and freedoms and downplay group coordinates such as family, class, tribe and clan. Limits to individual freedom are in principle set by the freedoms of others, though there may be a constant debate as to how to define these limits. Social needs are preferably met by the state, or by loose familial or associational structures. Indeed the state develops a stronger relationship with the emancipated individual through this transferred welfarism. America is a representative example of such individualist or humanist societies.

A contrary organisation upholds agreements in which the collective reality of groups bestows identity on their constituting individuals. Group identities and loyalties, acceptance of social roles and norms overshadow individual propensities and differences. The executive state is remote from its citizens – social groups are self-managing. The individual need for freedom can only be met by those renunciates who reject the social order and survive on its fringes. Most of the time particularities are taken care of by the formation of new groups based on common evolving differences within the old order. A group society accepts the existence of multiple groups – but tends to order them under an overarching hierarchical unity. Traditional Indian and Chinese societies reflecting this type of organisation, are also described by Mallik as group or absorptionist societies, given their tendency to absorb groups or ideas under a common social or philosophical umbrella.

A third organisational possibility rests on an unequal combination of individual and group values — the latter coalesce into a single community consisting of believers in a common God or deity: the individual has importance, but not over the community of the faithful. These societies exhibit strong solidarity and exclusiveness, and if necessary, individuals can be sacrificed for, or sacrifice themselves for, the community. Religious and political authority tend to compete if not merge. Mallik terms them community or dualist societies based as they are on
dual values. Three major examples of this type have originated in the Middle East – the Judaic, Christian and Islamic communities.

These macro-types constitute three attempted solutions to a societal problem – they cannot be ranked in an evolving temporal order though at any time one may be in the ascendant. All are inherently unstable and involved in the cyclic seesaw win/lose pattern of historical interactions, punctuated by pauses. Obviously each social scheme may find expression in several ‘civilizations’, and although the macro schemes exhibit durability, the civilizational and cultural expressions may change or disappear. Today there are hardly any pure instances of these schemes – but the typology is useful at a macro level for understanding Mallik’s analysis of conflict.

Thus for Mallik the problematic is not one of tradition and modernity, for modernity itself is a kind of tradition, an expansion of the humanist scheme originating in classical Greece and Rome. It involves, rather, a genuine emancipation from all tradition.

Social organisations embody value-systems based on preferences, since the acceptance of one value or set of values inexorably entails the rejection, however nuanced, of their opposites. Most values come in pairs, freedom or order, libertarianism or authoritarianism, equality or hierarchy, individualism or solidarity. Mallik sees this essential pattern reflecting the metaphysical duality which constitutes the universe, which he describes as Being and non-Being. He uses the term non-Being to describe the negative – and without entering into the details of his elaborate metaphysical reasoning, one may note that he comes to two conclusions: first, that although the Absolute Negative is unthinkable and self-contradictory, the relative negative is indeed possible and actual. His second conclusion, outlined in his second book of metaphysics, is that the Absolute Positive is also impossible – therefore what we have in the universe is a play of positive and negative non-absolutes. The concept of the non-absolute is the fulcrum of Mallik’s ethics of abstention.

It would be hazardous to guess at the origin of particular value-systems (Mallik posits a collective choice in some hoary founding moment) but they are reinforced by intuitive or revelatory or historical experience and maintained by a certain logical rationale. Values usefully imbue all social institutions but become specious when elevated into absolutes. Empirically, whether in individual or social behaviour, there is no evidence or rationale for asserting that any value, no matter how widespread, is universal. But since strongly emphasized values are
required for a society to remain functional, through a psycho-social illusion, core values may be designated absolute or universal. Illusion here is not used in the easily rectifiable sense of an individual perceptual illusion (such as a desert mirage), but as Kant described the pre-critical tendency of the human mind to transform regulatory ideas into real categories. Rational, logical support is provided to the illusion by the application of the Law of Contradiction to the relationship between preferred absolutes and their opposing values, according to which the latter are deemed non-existent: If A is, not-A is not. But the opposites far from disappearing continue to manifest in time and space alongside the chosen absolute, demanding adjustment into the system. Metaphysically, therefore, they are ascribed a kind of pseudo-existence, a temporary materialization that must one day yield to an existential and universal reification of the absolute. In the meantime, they earn a variety of derogatory and negative epithets – untrue, false, evil, unregenerate. Some feel it their responsibility to hasten the day of reification – so they indulge in what Mallik terms mythology – they strive to realise their myths or illusions by setting out to eliminate or overcome opposing values through persuasion, conversion, war, genocide.

The preferred value permeates the entirety of a social system, the obviously cultural or religious along with the economic, legal or political. Different value-systems threaten one another through upholding as absolute the discarded value of the other. Followers of what one side believes to be 'patently' evil or false are threatening by the very perversion of their faith. Both intra-societal and inter-societal conflicts are rooted in such incompatibilities – and they have preceded and succeeded the fall of the Berlin Wall. Even within the ambience of shared civilizational values, differences arise over appropriate methods or ways of achieving common goals. Thus we may read the Cold War as an example of intra-organisational conflict where two societies, communist and capitalist, clashed over the proper method of achieving shared humanist goals. Democrats and Republicans vie over the best way to fulfil the American dream. Conflict may manifest at any particular point, as a fight over territory or technology or commodities, but implicitly macro-systemic values are involved. For example the Gulf War could be variously described as a resumption of the Crusades, as a just war against a usurper, as a political bid to restore the international status quo ante, or as a commercially driven fight over oil supplies. It could also, as a Washington official recently put it, be seen as an exercise in saving western civilization.
Even more significant in Mallik’s account is the disutility or counter-productivity of war in achieving its own long-term goals: the essential plurality of the world, and the skewed nature of social values will always undermine the dominance of any socio-cultural system, leading to cycles of disequilibrium. Janus may well deduce that if the route to such purposeless conflict is through illusory absolutes and the mythological processes of their reification, then avoidance of conflict must be based on discarding illusions, recognising the non-absolute nature of values, and desisting from their reification.

As we are situated today, a certain amount of healthy scepticism about absolutes is indeed prevalent, but not yet universal. Where faith in absolutes persists, political, cultural or economic expansion continues. On the other hand, vulgar or radical scepticism can lead to a total rejection of the possibility of evaluation – a swing from absolute certainty to total uncertainty. Mallik cautions against this kind of spurious relativism. The non-absolute character of values does not imply that there is no criterion for choice, for a metaphysic of non-absolutes includes by definition the operations of a relative negative. Opposition has meaning in relationships of contrariety as mutual implication, but not as simultaneous manifestation: opposed values are not radically incompatible, rather than cease to exist they alternately manifest, providing criteria for choice and a rationale for co-existence.

It can only be a process of dis-illusionment in absolutes, an acceptance of the mutually implicatory nature of opposing values, insights into the necessarily skewed nature of all worldviews, that prepares the mind for new kinds of acceptance and recognition. Value-systems do not disappear overnight – nor should they, for they enable societies to cohere. At the same time major normative shifts can take place as happened when pagan Europe became Christian, or when Christendom yielded to modern humanism. But these changes were successions of one set of absolutist values by other absolutist values. Current scepticism about received values has not been succeeded by a new certainty. Hence it is immediately important to continue with received value systems while modifying the absolutist conflict-producing edge.

This can be done through the process of abstention. Abstention does not rest necessarily on mutual understanding which is difficult to realise from radically different positions. Nevertheless, it is possible, once one is armed with insights into the illusory nature of absolute values and the skewed aspects of world-descriptions, to desist – not from practising one’s own values – but from imposing them on others. One
can also refrain from insisting, for old habits die hard, on one’s own unique truth to the point of conflict. This act of forbearance is what Mallik terms abstention – an act which requires a positive exertion of energy to be effective, but is more akin to “letting-go” than “doing”. It is grounded in mutual respect – in a recognition that received world-views have been responsible for the glorious aspects of human achievement as well as its negativities. When these historical systems are placed side by side in the sunlight, they can be seen as pretty much equally functional and dysfunctional. Acceptance of other weltanschauungs does not mean condoning or excusing what appears as negative, but it does mean a refusal to fight or go to war over it.

Abstention has the potential to bring about peace. But, as Mallik argues, peace by itself is not the summum bonum. It is only a truce or stand-off between conflictually-inclined social systems. Something more is needed to realize the optimum life.

Mallik’s second philosophical treatise elaborates his theory of Related Multiplicity, which seeks to establish that relationship arises necessarily out of multiplicity and pluralism. The many are always related – that is logically unavoidable. As essentially related beings, they inhabit a universe containing areas of commonalty and agreements which can form the basis on which to build both world peace and world harmony, for the two are not the same thing. The backward-looking head of Janus enables us to see the social and survival compulsions that have fostered the need for barriers and absolutes, for divisions into pure and impure, believers and infidels, progressives and conservatives, first and third-worlders. But with the current dilution of absolutist thinking, there is a greater acknowledgement of legitimate diversity and a more pervasive scepticism: instead of dogmatism and certainty in cultural matters, conditions are propitious for widened horizons and innovative perspectives. Looking forward with Janus we can collectively strive for the conditions where individuals and groups the world over collaborate in deciding the parameters for a new world, and not merely a new world-order.

For that to happen, for people from all over the world to talk to one another in conditions of authentic dialogue, there must be peace or freedom from conflict. A new world-order envisaged by a dominant group will only be the imposition of one particular viewpoint upon the rest, and contain within itself the seeds of discontent and conflict. Hence only world peace can provide the preconditions for universal collaboration, for enabling a common imaging of new forms of societal association. A
future world society has to be based on a commonly evolved human code involving all the people of the earth. Mallik trusted that universal scepticism leading to mutual abstention would usher in an era of prolonged peace in which it would be possible for this to happen. He did not envisage a backsliding from this position, on the ground insight creates an irreparable rupture with error and confusion. Fundamentalisms are a last-ditch self-contradictory stand against the challenges of difference, and not harbingers of the new, or even restatements of the past. Hence he did not consider it a serious possibility for humanity to forego the opportunity to move into a harmonious future, once peace had been achieved. Problems, therefore, relate to the process of emancipation from illusions that will lead to this interim stage of world peace.

At least four conditions for achieving peaceful co-existence arise out of the Mallikean analytic.

The first condition, and from which the others flow is Mallik's implicit absolute of rigorous equality. It appears to be a rebuttal of all that he has said about the pairs of opposites and non-absolutes, for equality also has an opposite which is a constant challenge to democratic regimes, not to mention those based openly on inequality or hierarchy. Given obvious human disparities arising at times out of irremediable conditions, what could be the meaning of human equality? We can understand that what is culturally different is not thereby unequal, but what of individual differences? Human rights theorists derive equality from an intrinsic human nature: Mallik grounds equality in his philosophic understanding of reality.

His argument rests on a revised interpretation of Cartesian doubt. Descartes made a jump from the fact that a doubting 'I' is indubitable to the proposition that this residual 'I', actually no more than a contentless existence, could reconstitute the entire intellect and ego with all the dubitable ideas he had just discarded. Philosophers have been trying to organise these unstable mental contents ever since, and they certainly cannot serve as ground for human equality. To go past this illegitimate leap from a doubting 'I' to the entire mental being, Mallik offered an alternative procedure. Certainty will be found in the positive background to the last instance of doubt, i.e., that which makes comparisons between opposite terms or alternatives possible. Conflicting opposites, which create uncertainty or doubt, can be reduced to a common ground, though that ground again will be in opposition to some other. Finally one is reduced to the minimal ground which is indispensable for the possibility of experience, but that ground is not the 'I' or ego as we
know it. In corroboration Hannah Arendt observed that the ‘realness’ of events, objects, thoughts, is “the only property that remains stubbornly beyond reach (of thinking). The cogito is subject to the same doubt as sum.” The positive background to the last instance of doubt or thought is pure reality – that which cannot be doubted. This quality-less reality forms the background for any and every individual’s experience; and since all individuals are grounded in the same reality, a reality that has no degrees, all are intrinsically equal. The pair of opposites, equality and inequality do not apply to this underlying reality which is the ground of all opposites – one is obliged to use the word equal to emphasize the similar non-differentiated embeddedness of all individuals in the common ground, and to refute any theories of fundamental inequality. Thus the common ground becomes the source of normative equality in the manifest world – because Mallik assumes as did Plato, that the real is also the good.

Equality between world views has a different basis: it is not a substantive equality judged in terms of truth or success, but an equality of effort stemming from the multiple, adequate/inadequate attempts to order society and the world. The concept of cultural equality thus also contains an important negative common factor – civilizational achievement plus failure to achieve a stable and harmonious world order. Taking into account these two types of equality as between individuals and between cultural and civilizational groups, it is possible to arrive at the kind of mutual respect necessary to ensure equitable international citizenship.

By and large the world today is not ready for trans-cultural dialogue founded on such a stringent basis of equality, and absolute values continue to lurk below the surface of rational thought and communication. So the next three conditions will outline how these stubborn absolutes are to be managed.

The second condition, arising as a corollary from the above concept of equality, is the obligation of dialogue partners to refrain from conversion, forcible or persuasive, of one culture or point of view to another. This applies not only to religious conversion, but also to the entire gamut of socio-political-cultural-intellectual life. No society has arrived at the final truth and there is little sense in propagating half-truths.

A third condition for dialogue entails both searching for a minimal common ground - for human societies have common survival and sociational needs - and also respecting and recognizing differences. In moments of euphoria differences tend to get swept under the carpet, but reemerge under altered conditions. Dialogues which prefer to empha-
size only agreements cannot guarantee a stable outcome. On the other hand, rejecting norms altogether is a recipe for chaos. Obviously one needs both to agree and disagree, although the practice is by no means as simple as it sounds.

The fourth condition is the equal obligation on all parties to practise abstention – to draw back from argument or competition when signals indicate a flashpoint. Irritation is bound to arise when people from vastly differing perspectives come together to explore a common subject. If it reaches high noise levels it is important to reduce the temperature by consciously refraining from insistence on a particular point of view. This principled abstention again arises out of awareness of a systemic incompleteness running through all cultural paradigms.

Such conditions and experiments allow for the evolution of non-conflictual modes of thought, with enough play for maintaining the received values of different cultures and societies. This kind of negative peace however, does not answer the human need for fulfilment, and still leaves unsolved the problems associated with skewed value-systems. The next task, therefore, lies in moving towards a new way of ordering society based on dual and equal non-absolute values, where contraries will be viewed as complementaries, not opposites. In the latter relationship, contraries stalemate one another, in the former they combine in a larger perspective. This cannot be embarked on in the immediate present or near future, but only after a global peace has been well enough established to allow for the imagers – poets, artists, visionaries – to conceive of new forms and patterns. The last effort will be to fulfil them.

With Janus to the future: the uses of nonviolence and abstention

Professor Robert Holmes has remarked that realistically speaking, it might take the world a thousand years to adopt nonviolence as a common way of life: reculturation of ingrained habits of violence cannot but be a long and slow process. Historical experience points to force and violence as the only effective ways of dealing with aggression and injustice, but in an overcrowded, communications-intensive planet with easily available technologies of mass destruction, room for violent manoeuvres is shrinking. But to train people to think, act and live nonviolently would require reeducation on a massive scale. This need not be a cause for despair for nonviolence, like democracy, grows slowly under vigilant care and nurturance. What started as democracy with the Magna Carta in 1214 in England – or earlier with the Althing in Iceland, or with the pre-Buddhist Licchavi republics in India – is a continuously evolving, not
necessarily irreversible, fragile and vulnerable process. Similarly the inculcation of habits of nonviolence is an enterprise worth embarking on despite the fact that it is likely to be a slow and zigzag process.

Objections are sometimes raised that in the coming era humans will be less and less in face to face encounters with one another – friendly or unfriendly. Warfare is already mechanized and remote; technology futurologists promise a further mechanized ergo de-humanized future. Nonviolence, on the other hand, presumes or demands face-to-face groups or communities enlivened by a moral dynamic. Is modern distancing rendering this obsolete?

Without succumbing to technological fatalism it is well to heed the warnings and take preventive action or devise alternatives where possible. From across a wide spectrum there is a concern for restoring community life, or maintaining it where it has not disintegrated, to cope with alienation and de-humanization; if successful, one of the vital elements of conventional nonviolence will be secured. Even otherwise, in the immediate present, it is possible to envisage that the very processes that create a primary distance amongst persons can themselves become the vehicles for moral exchange. For example through modern communications nonviolentists can make themselves visible to the antagonist to appeal to the latter’s conscience. Erosion of moral sensitivity however, would create formidable obstacles. If the ‘banality of evil’ arises from lack of thought, as Arendt suggests, or quite simply from a defective conscience, and if this ‘banality’ is an offshoot of modern urban and technological culture, then one would have to think hard about fresh ways, social, political and educational, to re-sensitize the moral nature.

The failure of sporadic nonviolent efforts also points to the need for systematic education in moral and nonviolent thought and action. As Gandhi saw it, popular nonviolence has to be strengthened by a standing army of satyagrahis or nonviolentists, to educate and assist people and to devise alternatives to violent settlement of disputes.

However nonviolence is not intrinsically an act of peace, though it is behaviourally peaceful. It is a demand for justice, and justice is also often a contested concept. Satyagraha virtually carries a threat, of violence to oneself inflicted through the medium of the other, even to the point of death if necessary. Thus if the other ultimately agrees to the demands of the satyagrahi, it need not necessarily be due to realising the truth or justice of the latter’s position. The antagonist may be convinced by the satyagrahi’s moral position, but he or she might also yield because his or her own position has become untenable due to other con-
considerations – fear of public censure, or a moral anxiety stemming from the use of violence against non-resisters. Neither entails accepting the justice of the protestor’s demands but constitutes capitulation before a perceived threat, whereas nonviolence is meant to open a gateway to truth.

Nonviolence is a method of procuring justice, or drawing attention to and resisting injustice. In so far as nonviolence is a means (although Gandhi at times suggested that it was also an end), it is judged in terms of the legitimacy of its aims. Recognising the possibility of human error in understanding the totality of a situation, Gandhi adduced a secondary reason for preferring nonviolent action – if the satyagrahi (the nonviolent truth-seeking activist) is mistaken, at least no physical injury is inflicted on the antagonist. Furthermore, the possibility of suffering on the part of the satyagrahi might enable him or her to ponder more deeply into the rights and wrongs of the claims being fought for, and to undertake the struggle with a greater sense of responsibility. Certainly, in principle, the conduct of nonviolent agitation always leaves the door open for discussion and modification: indeed, the nonviolent challenge itself constitutes the opening shot of what should continue as authentic dialogue along Mallikean lines as outlined in the previous section.

Dialogues need to be differentiated from debates which are contests where generically speaking one party ultimately wins. Debating techniques and rhetorical skills are less geared to arriving at a common truth and more at winning a particular argument. They are of the same order as legal contention, though not similarly bound by acknowledged rules and codes. The Mallikean metaphysic and the dialogue conducted under its aegis do not envisage a winner in the conventional sense. Hence debate has to be evolved into a dialogue – into an open-ended and collaborative exploration of understanding and truth. All protagonists are at the starting line, and if the winner’s tape is reached, it can only be reached by all together.

It is said that Janus’ shrine in the Roman forum only closed its double doors in times of ‘absolute peace’. This absolute peace, as hinted at in the beginning of this paper, can only be an individual a-temporal experience, and the closing of outlooks to past and future aptly symbolise it. But if it refers to conditions of social or political peace, then as already discussed, it cannot be qualified by the adjective ‘absolute’. Even world peace as defined by Mallik is not absolute peace, for the disagreements and differences have not disappeared. The enduring ideal is global harmony, and it is only in this future projected situation that Janus’ doors can be justifiably shut. It may be platitudinous to say that
theoreticians either tend to read the past into the future (the pessimists or self-styled ‘realists’) or the future into the past, (the utopians, who dream rather than ‘see’, into the future). But since the future has both tendencies, to repeat the past and innovate the new, and presuming that Janus looks forward to the truly new, one may derive hope of emancipation from history and study such pointers to peaceful living as suggested by Gandhi and Mallik.

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1 In the course of a private discussion.