Commentary

This is a commentary on a paper that was read during the 52nd reading group session of the *CDSI* (Critical Disability Studies in India)[1] on 18th July 2020. The paper that was taken up was a slightly older manuscript version of the paper "Ahimsa and the ethics of caring: Gandhi's spiritual experiments with truth via an[2] idea of a vulnerable human body" by Hemachandran Karah, published in a volume titled *Disability, Avoidance and the Academy: Challenging resistance*, during the session are identified in different colours and by the name of the person who made the comment in square brackets right at the beginning of a particular comment. After incorporating all the relevant comments made by the group members, we sent the paper with comments to the author of the paper for their comments, to be published in the next issue of the journal. The version below therefore contains several interruptions/ interpretations by the members of the CDSI group.

[Tanmoy] Today's reading has come about while discussing Campbell (2019)[3], especially her new stance on ableism—while talking about variability (p. 153) and discussing the concept TAB (temporarily abled body) and its problems when Sameer suggested that we take up Hemachandran's paper along with the ableism papers; and since the group has not read an Indian text for a long time, it was thought that it might be a good idea to stick to this paper. The first point is about how ableism problematises TAB and how the Gandhian model fits into that, since Gandhi's experiments are also about contingent disabilities. Secondly, keeping the next meeting in mind, where Fiona herself will join us[4], we should try and see how this paper or the idea therein relates to the ableism model.

[Sameer] I mentioned 'Reading Gandhi' by Dr Hemachandran Karah within the context of disability, rights-based orientation and vulnerable bodies. In the background of such critical engagement by Campbell, we did in our last session where she appeared to privilege global South discourses about the organisation, some of us felt uncomfortable, also intrigued, about how bodies could be utilised as a centre-point to create a liberal dialogue of disability from the Global South. There was a somewhat heated discussion on the politics of terminology that happened when Prof Anita Ghai tried convincing young scholars like me and others in the group about the ways one could construct a liberal politics of disability by moving away from the social model of disability (Radical Politics) to a debate where body and its temporal vulnerable nature are discussed. Yogesh's understanding of Prof. Dan Goodley's

[1] https://sites.google.com/view/cdsi/home
[2] 'an' was replaced by 'the' in the published version of the paper.
[3] The paper referred to here is "Precision ableism: A studies in ableism approach to developing histories of disability and abledment" by Fiona Kumari Campbell (*Rethinking History*, 2019, Vol. 23, No. 2, 138–156) that was discussed in the 51st reading group session of the CDSI on 27th June, 2020.
[4] This refers to the 53rd meeting of the CDSI held on 8th August, 2020.

conceptualisation of Dis/ability is akin to how Gandhi approached questions of self-reflexivity and attitude towards the other in *Hind Swaraj*[5]. It made me suggest a rereading of Gandhi from a critical disability perspective as I feel the reading and the author both could be placed under the larger rubric of critical disability studies. As per my reading goes, the usage of *ahimsa* goes well with the way the author has utilised the concepts of masculinity and heterosexuality as violence.

[Abhishek] Picking up from the last discussion [see note 3] on Fiona Kumari Campbell's paper which talked about how the able/disable dichotomy needs to be revisited, it was see that inspired by Buddhist Philosophy, she uses ideas like *Paticcasamuppada*[6], to suggest that since bodies are impermanent, we need to engage in more of a spiritual exercise. And this paper has the same tone even when it's not exactly talking about disability. If we try to force a connection to Critical Disability Studies, then we can say that this paper, like papers by Dan Goodley and Fiona K. Campbell, emphasises on breaking old boundaries and looking at things from a new perspective.

[Sharmishthaa] Fiona's way of using Buddhist philosophy maybe does not have any spiritual tone to it; whereas this paper definitely talks about the spiritual interpretation of Gandhi's experiments. The two papers are of different categories as disability and the theories themselves are dealt very differently by the two scholars. Buddhist epistemology is an established school of thought and Gandhi uses such schools of thought to achieve a certain political aim

[Tanmoy] About the paper, I have a fear that our old critique of the label 'divyangjan' may also apply to Hem's interpretation of Gandhi and Gandhi's own take on 'marginalities', itself.

[Ritika] One would like to add here that the paper seems to present a unidirectional flow of action. The action is always supposed to emerge from the side of the 'able' bodied person, towards those with a disability, in this case a person with leprosy. What then is the giver of this care learning from the person with leprosy, if anything at all? Is this not very similar to a pity or charity model?

[Tanmoy] Exactly (agreeing here with Ritika's point about directionality in Gandhi's action and how this seems like a Charity model all over again), but note that Hem's language is constructed carefully enough so that it doesn't imply that a disabled person cannot be a 'giver' of care but it also doesn't include such a possibility by articulating it. There is nothing in the paper which indicates that this direction of care is included but there's nothing that excludes

---

[5] *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule* is a book written by Mohandas K. Gandhi in 1909. In it he expresses his views on Swaraj, modern civilization, mechanisation etc. The book was banned in 1910 by the British government in India as a seditious text [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hind_Swaraj_or_Indian_Home_Rule]

[6] *paṭiccasamuppāda* is Pali version of the Sanskrit expression *pratītyasamutpāda*, "commonly translated as dependent origination, or dependent arising, [it] is a key doctrine of Buddhist philosophy." [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pratītyasamutpāda]

it either. However, this is absolutely the right critical approach to the paper and a CDS group like ours would do exactly that.

[Santosh] (Talking about the collection Sandhya Kumar (2019) *Jeevan Sangram ke Yoddhaa*, NBT) Some of the stories collected in the book have disabled characters that take care of their relatives. For example, one story has a hunchback character who raises her nephew after the death of his parents (Sacchidanand Dhoomketu's 'Ek Thi Shakun Di'). Similarly, in one story the main character who is physically impaired, decides to remain unmarried and keep her sister and widowed sister-in-law with her after retirement. I am currently writing about these characters in the collection.

[Abhishek] (talking emotional support by disabled persons to others) Just adding onto the point made by Santosh, saying how in his personal experience he finds that the relation is of interdependence and the emotional person ends up providing a lot of emotional support to families/carers.

[Tanmoy] Yes, of course Abhishek, actually in this group, we talked about this in detail many times, when Sameer and others shared how they in fact provide emotional support to many of their friends. But I think we should look at the present paper not taking it as a paper situated within the DS model, just because the author is person with disability (and we know him, he was very much a part of the group initially when he was briefly in Delhi). He's rather exploring other ways of understanding disability. It so happens that this particular take has been done before but still, we shouldn't pre-judge the paper.

Ahimsa and the ethics of caring: Gandhi's spiritual experiments with truth via an idea of a vulnerable human body

Hemachandran Karah

Mahatma Gandhi's principle of ahimsa (i.e., nonviolence) concerns not a mere absence of violence, but an active pursuit of peace by way of satya or truth. Ahimsa demands of the followers that they eschew violence, and still better, uphold satya in speech, thought, and action. Doing so, it is believed, one can facilitate a spiritual transformation of the atman or soul which resides within the temporary 'tabernacle' of the human body. For Gandhi, such a tabernacle seems an appropriate object for a spiritual experimentation with ahimsa since it is prone to myriad vulnerabilities, and therefore diversely disposed to an ethic of caring against structural violence.

[Tanmoy] This paragraph has the word 'tabernacle', it's a well-known word in the context of a biblical reference, in particular. In terms of meaning, it means just a 'tent' which was

supposed to be in the middle of the desert, near Palestine, where Jesus met Moses and otherwise a specific location surrounded by other tents with people from different tribes, where basically God's appearance takes place.

Now, if you know Hem's academic background, he has a PhD from Cambridge on English literature, and if you follow the style in the first part of the paper, you will notice a lot of symbolism to do with the Charkha, the mother's breast etc. Yet this word tabernacle, which lends itself to a lot of symbolism and metaphoric interpretation, he doesn't use it as such, he uses it to merely denote a temporary place of habitation for the spirit/ soul. Tabernacle has been used metaphorically in many other texts, not disability texts, but perhaps more to do with gospel teaching or religious mythology.

The second is a minor point in the 2nd sentence itself, 'speech, thought and action' are used in that order, which is interesting because at the very end, I think the last line, the order becomes 'thought, speech and action', where he is talking about the politics of intention. And one of the relevant points that should emerge there is about intention, it's intention that characterises a person, but Gandhi's point is also about action which is important – it's action and not an abstract idea which gives one transcending possibility. Personally, I feel that this point about intention from the point of view of a person with disability is relevant, perhaps this is a controversial point, and I am open to criticism, but should intention necessarily precede action for a person with disability?

Also, personally, I believe, that the term 'accommodation' that Hem uses from Gandhi, which we can take to be inclusion, also must have a pre-condition that mental accommodation must precede physical accommodation, because I believe that the other way round is not true accommodation. This refers to the sequence cited above, and it cannot be 'thought, speech, action'.

[Vageshwari] For Gandhi, I believe, it was accommodation rather than inclusion, as inclusion is 'more to do' with mental change whereas accommodation is about creating a space physically. I think these can be seen as two different concepts and cannot be put under a sequence. For a person with disability I believe both accommodation and inclusion are necessary. All throughout Gandhi's experiments with himself, with his relations or with changing his attire in order to fit himself in a community were all merely accommodations initially. In London, he got rid of his tuft which was only so that people don't laugh at him and then he acquired western clothes too, and when he realised that the clothes were a powerful political statement, as a sign of mourning to protest he shaved his head and wore *dhoti kurta*, then as a *kathiawad* peasant and so on and finally as he announced that he will give up his *topi* and vest and take on loin cloth as an "experiment for a month or two" to which he gradually got mentally accustomed to as well and so never gave it up.

Certain corporeal vulnerabilities that become significant to him this way include nakedness, transgendering, and leprosy. Gandhi's tactic of ahimsa is unique since he, first, meticulously prepares himself for a spiritual identification with such vulnerabilities and, second, utilises his

intimate knowledge of them to evolve a universal ethic of caring. Such an ethic is usually aimed at rehabilitation of violent structures, in order that they become sites of individual and collective spiritual transformation. What emerges in the process is a spectrum of approaches to violence that treat bodily vulnerability as an experiment in ahimsa, duly informed by the principle of universal care. Disciplines concerned with structural violence such as disability studies, I propose, may benefit from these approaches; especially their readiness to transcend contingent stances concerning violence.

[Tanmoy] structural violence in reference to disability, but very soon the paper will talk about his experiments with how to queer (male) sexuality in order to understand how to construct peace.

[Nidhi] Gandhi emphasises on the connection from individual to nation, wherein individuals are the basic unit of a nation. In this sense, he gives importance to each individual.

[Tanmoy] yes, we need to discuss this further, as this paper shows that Gandhi is talking of going from an individual action to a collective teaching/ action, so in the context of this paper, it can't be the case that Gandhi is interested in personal, individual level of caring.

The naked poor, inner worlds, and the spiritual medium of khadi

The idea that the human body is a makeshift tabernacle of the atman, and that it is vulnerable to structural violence, becomes apparent to Gandhi during his extensive travel across rural India. The nearly naked poor in that part of the world bring him closer to harsh contexts of economic deprivation, and perhaps their inner spiritual tatter as well. To persuade himself in identifying with the naked masses, and their tattered inner lives, Gandhi takes to khadi (i.e., home-spun cloth), but just enough to wrap his waist. With this gesture, he strips away certain favourite sartorial specialities such as an attorney's apparel that is machine-designed from Britain. What emerges as a consequence is Swadeshi, Gandhi's personal and public fight against foreign-made clothes based on the idea of self-reliance (Trivedi, 2007).

Gandhi's eventful stripping into a loin-cloth is in many ways a public dramatisation of an urge to taper a compulsive materialist mimic in him. For example, in changing over to a farmer's attire, Gandhi hopes to identify with the inner worlds of the millions, who perhaps do not have the wherewithal to afford even a minimal clothing. However, mere stripping may not get him there. For a start, he needs to meditate on vulnerabilities and the symbolic significance of certain vestments of power that still cling to his shoulders. His recollections of racism in South Africa serve such an end.

Envelopes of power closer to Gandhi's skin, such as a lawyer's habitus, underwent tumultuous impingements, and possibly a stripping in South Africa: he was thrown out of a train, fatally beaten by the police, and several times asked to get rid of his turban (Gandhi, 1948). Naturally, his inner worlds jittered, and perhaps appeared naked and vulnerable, as did

layers of symbolic investments, including a shell of erotic love for his wife Kasturba. It is one thing to undergo a skin-ego torment amid upward mobility, but entirely another thing to convert it into a rich inner resource that may aid an ahimsa mission. Fortuitously, Gandhi discovers a priceless spiritual medium in Khadi that could indeed facilitate this. Sitting on a spinning-wheel or charka, Gandhi reasons, he, and the masses too, will be able to spin together coarse inner realities as though they were constituent bits of yarn in a Khadi fabric.

But in what way does poverty-induced nakedness affect inner worlds? A Reduction to rags may be a crude symptom of a structural malice that has no credence for self-dignity, and worse, a human need for a symbolic covering against naked exposure. To elucidate the idea of symbolic covering, we might consider for a moment Donald W. Winnicott's framework of attachment. Winnicott's interest in symbolism concerns the way it is deployed by children as a substitute for a mother's breast. Children recreate a mother's breast by a score of symbols so that its availability does not depend on hers. In preserving the mother's breast, and investing it with renewed meanings, the child begins exploring immediate boundaries, which Winnicott calls 'play'. Phenomena that transpire during a play with the mother-figure do not fully belong to a child's external reality. Nor do they emerge as pure interpsychic entities. In fact, they materialise as an exchange of objects within the cultural spaces created by the child and the mother dyad (Winnicott, 1971). Gandhi's version of play, I suggest, is spinning. Like play, spinning acknowledges the need for a dependency relationship in the care of the naked poor. As in play, spinning also entails inner objects exchanging with the immediate cultural environment, facilitated by a special bodily intervention. But unlike Winnicott's play, Gandhi's home-spinning is not based on an individualised caregiving dyad. Instead, it is a collective play for creating a medium such as khadi, which in turn connects one and all via a universal caregiving experience.

[Tanmoy] This section has to be read carefully, as the concepts of 'play' and other symbolism are intricately woven into the text — this is not our usual DS discourse which needs to be filtered out carefully. For example, this paper in the middle of the above paragraph says: spinning also entails inner objects exchanging with the immediate cultural environment, this is a little vague for me, what are 'inner objects' here?

[Nidhi] 'Inner objects', here, refers to our inner being. It has been understood as our truth, our soul or our spirit. To spin thread, requires a calm, meditative mind and spirit. This calm mind gradually discovers the rhythm of its being and body. The entire being moves together in harmony to spin thread. What I think Gandhi's craft based education offers to disability study is its emphasis on the individual. This emphasis is a journey inwards as well as with the outside world. The journey inwards helps an individual to discover him/herself, to find its purpose, its own pace and to accept its differences with confidence. This confidence in its own self emerges through practice of a craft. Every individual sees through practice their ability to create something useful. This becomes their contribution to society, which in turn gives dignity to the individual.

In other words, khadi's caregiving potential is derived not so much from a literal clothing norm. It is rather linked to esoteric yet universally realisable meanings that advocates of the fabric bring to it via a collective participation ethic. Given such a meaning-generating potential, Gandhi calls charka a piece of poetry. The comment comes amid a million khadi enthusiasts, who on a moment of withdrawal on the charka begin treating it with an intimacy noticeable only between an audience and a work of art, such as poetry. For example, while on the charka, as yarn after yarn spin away, a khadi devotee gets a chance to churn out textures of the self that remain non-ingested inside. Some of these non-ingested objects include, among others, aggression, hatred, narcissism, and an idea that an individual's boundary is all but a close-knit singular skin. Such is the cathartic power of charka, a poetic mirror, that Gandhi recommends everybody to present themselves in full to it, for at least half an hour a day. Clearly, some attribute their 'sleep of innocence' to charka, now, a mirror that can reflect back their longstanding negative projections, such as untouchability and religious hatred (Joshi, 2002). Thus, in uniting all (including the naked poor) with a rare symbolic intimacy, khadi emerges as a universal covering beyond a crude literalism. Such a covering, Gandhi recognises, is as precious as a parental safety blanket in a child's play. In fact, he calls khadi a Kamadhenu. In the Hindu mythology, Kamadhenu emerges as a bovine goddess and a symbol of bountifulness (Leeming, 2006). For Gandhi, Kamadhenu is what a symbolic breast is to Winnicott's typical child. Both the figurative arrangements serve well when the objects that they are supposed to represent – namely, khadi and a mother's breast – are available with a restriction.

[Tanmoy] Nidhi can you tell us more about the Kamdhenu equation here?

[Nidhi] Kamadhenu is a mythical symbol of 'plenty', 'abundance'. Here, I think the writer is recalling Gandhi's reference to khadi as kamadhenu. Khadi as one craft supports many crafts — agriculture, spinning, weaving, garment making — are some of the directly related crafts. Then it also supports other crafts of carpentry, blacksmithery, etc. This is one side of the coin that presents interdependence and sustainability through one craft and so once explored it gives plenty for survival. The other side concerns the individual. Khadi gives an opportunity to its practitioners to become aware of their abundant intellectual, physical and spiritual potential. It makes possible for a person to rely on its own capacities, become self-reliant and not just financially but also affectively, intellectually and physically.

[Sharmishthaa] the idea of charkha as a poetry- weaving the yarns of one's inner self-we know comes from the Bhakti movement. The reference is important here as seeing Gandhi only as a spiritual figure leaving aside his situatedness in India's politics then, would be a mistake to my opinion. He took spiritual or religious refuge at times to make things popular amongst the people. Thus 'Khadi as Kamdhenu' denotes khadi as an economic activity.

Neither the naked lot, nor a million hands on the charka are necessarily moved by Gandhi's special attraction for Kamadhenu. However, what ties them to Gandhi is his transcendent approach to structural violence on an inner self. Again, Gandhi's khadi mission appears

accessible since one can relate to the idea that nakedness is a structural impingement, and a transcendence lies in a willingness to treat the same as an opportunity to build inner attachments that may potentially reform imperial structures by nonviolent means. Charka emerges as a nonviolent spiritual means in this regard, and not an end in itself.

Androgyny, queer kinships, and the deviant ethics of caring

Gandhi also voluntarily strips into a special kind of nudity as he remains clad in a loin-cloth. This time, the nudity concerns the symbolic figure of the 'androgyne', who becomes explicit about sexuality (Kumar, 2006). Gandhi's art of androgynising, especially its nude manifestation, concerns not so much an erotic desire, but a caring relationship that is meant to transcend an aggressive heterosexual norm. His keenness to queer heteronormative ethos, as well as a special immersion into a long tradition of Indian sainthood, renders such a androgynous figure uniquely transgressive.

An identification with a community of androgynous sadhus or ascetics is at its best when Gandhi takes to Brahmacharya (i.e., the vow of celibacy) after almost 23 years of married life with Kasturba. Although adopted with an intent to contain violent expressions of masculinity, the vow aids Gandhi in understanding the limitation of erotic love for an anaclitic love object. To understand his relationship with Kasturba, and other women associates as well, Gandhi prods his celibate body into enacting a female consciousness. To this end, he sets Ramakrishna Paramahansa, a 19thcentury mystic, and a rich lineage of male saints as his models. Paramahansa is supposed to have attained a perfect female consciousness, so much that he was able to simulate menstruation (Kumar, 2006). Gandhi does not go in that direction. Instead, he gradually takes to the idea of androgyny to understand first, traces of violence in an individual's sexuality and, second, the ways and means with which one can transcend it via a care ethic that is beyond trappings of an institution such as family, where a strict gender norm is in place. To reach a point where he can simulate androgyny beyond family constrains, he needs to gradually discard his skin-ego as a paterfamilias. To accomplish this, and to extenuate his family boundary, Gandhi takes to queering (i.e., a diminution of gender essentialism).

[Ritika] The understanding of gender within the text is also to be problematised. Just at the surface of it, we know that gender norms and roles are socially constructed. Then to say that masculinity is the source of violence is not apt at all. Since everything is learnt, one needs to distance oneself from the binary opposites of masculinity and femininity. Which of course also brings in the question of queer identities, but that is another complex debate altogether.

[Abhishek] I don't like the way he's using 'queering' here...

[Tanmoy] The term here is more to do with subverting the heteronormative.

[Abhishek] Plus there is a contradiction. While queerness and any sexual behaviour deemed subversive leads to social ostracization of the person, Gandhi uses subversion to claim a higher place in the ladder of morality, attaining a saint like status. So that is a problem which remains.

[Sharmishthaa] Apart from the problem of Gandhi using queerness as prosthetics, I want to add that as the author states in the beginning that 'Disability Studies might want to pick up from Gandhi's experiments as he tries to give a model to transgress the contingencies of the body and break through the structural violence', and if this experiment is to be seen with the perspective of an idea of a generic inclusion, even then the experiment doesn't seem to be inclusive enough as these experiments were only restricted to Gandhi himself and others in the Ashram were not allowed to have their own experiments, to the extent that they were not even allowed to marry without his permission, there are factual references for this.

In a queer kinship arrangement, household ceases to be a center of economic and cultural activity. Because of their credence to a loose organization of relationships, queer kinships also distance themselves from dyadic heterosexual bondings. Naturally, they remain amorphous and generic in character (Hines, 2007). Gandhi's brahmacharya experiments, in like manner, destabilise his household so that it becomes more of an ashram, a hermitage with an open door. A dyadic bonding between Gandhi and his wife – and for that matter, any special tie to a love-object – comes to a halt in the ashram. Rather than a paterfamilias figure, Gandhi too begins to relate to Kasturba as a brother, a parent, a friend, and what not. Over a period of time, the couple dissolve the tenacious opposition between eros and philia. Thus, a queering example thrives in Gandhi's ashrams, wherever they are. The ashrams are also inhabited by Gandhi's women associates who relate to him in different shades. Many of them self-identify with him as daughters, apostles, nurses, sisters, soldiers, amanuenses, and so on, all at once. Now, he calls Saraladevi Chowdharani, a woman associate as a 'spiritual wife', and Hermann Kallenbach, a jewish male associate, his 'Lower House' (Kumar, 2006). The special signification that lower house is a place of debate and multiple vocalisation, upper house the place of moderation, and that both the terms of reference are tied to a homosocial symbolism are hard to miss. So is the concept of spiritual wife, which can no longer be realised in a mundane heterosexual tie.

Speaking about the mundane, Gandhi's kinship has a place for the irrational and the 'mad' too. For example, his women associates Nilla Cram Cook and Margarete Spiegel, known as the 'mad duo', are encouraged to go astray – up to a point. Often compared to Isadora Duncan, an American innovator of dance, Cook arrives in at Gandhi's ashram as his disciple. She seeks mukti or liberation in dance, as much as Gandhi, who is now hailed by her as a soulmate. Gandhi calls her as his spiritual incarnate. Such a soulful interaction does not last for long: Cook's mad indulgence into the banal seems unacceptable to Gandhi. She is inspired by the story of Krishna of the BhagvatPurana. Like Gopis, the mystical female playmates of Krishna, Cook wishes to dance away in the banks of river Yamuna, engaging all her bodily

self. This does not appeal to Gandhi who is rather enamoured by Krishna of the Bhagavad Gita, a being who is deliberative, dutiful, and yet caring. To constrain Cook's bohemian spirit, Gandhi gets her into a unisex attire. Feeling restricted and degendered, Cook leaves Gandhi, never to return to his queered cosmos (Kumar, 2006). Spiegel, who is often refered to by Gandhi as 'mad as a mad hatter', also flees. She is for ever on the look-out for an ideal love object. At one point, she falls for Gandhi, hailing him as a super-god. Yet in another instance, she swings into a bohemian worldview involving marriage, love, and passion (Kumar, 2006). Now, Gandhi who is suspicious about heterosexual love, begins treating Spiegel's compulsive embrace of the same as shere 'madness'. In other words, in Cook and Spiegel's situation, Gandhi seems to treat madness as a mental state that is primarily driven by an aggressive heterosexual orientation.

[Tanmoy] quite apart from 'madness', I have a problem here with Gandhi's objecting to two *women*, yeah both happen to be women, so it looks like when it comes to 'controlling' anybody's clothing, it has to be a woman's – we are all too familiar with this trope!

[Abhishek] It becomes more like a role-play where one person is controlling what he wants the other person to play. One day a mother/carer, the other day something else. In this, the power equation makes its problematic since it's Gandhi who is taking all the decisions.

A compulsory offer of unisex attire for Cook is by no means an exceptional event; it is more of a normative consideration concerning queering in Gandhi's brahmacharya scheme of things. Gandhi's queering ethos evolves over a period of four decades, roughly from the time he takes the brahmacharya vow. In the beginning, he seeks recourse to androgyny to organise an erasure of purusatva (heterosexual maleness), which he finds violent and domineering. Off and on, he overcomes the male ego by installing in him a naritva (i.e femaleness), and still better, a maternal consciousness (Nandy, 1989). The installation aids Gandhi to relate to others as a mother-figure, notwithstanding their age and gender. However, his heterosexual male ego does not withdraw that easily. In fact, Gandhi keeps a complete vigil so that he can prevent a coup by it on his personhood. Amid an almost absent erotic predisposition, he sleeps with a bevy of women, only to discover a transcendent third space that is beyond a strict gender binary. Inhabiting that third space, Gandhi inculcates a deviant ethic of caring that is less biased in favour of a heteronormative ideal. His brahmacharya life with Manu Gandhi – especially the one at Noakhali – is a testimony to the emergence of such a deviant norm.

Manu Gandhi – fondly known as Manudi – is bearly 19 when she becomes a somewhat reluctant partner to Gandhi's brahmacharya experiments at Noakhali. Noakhali, a district in the Eastern part of British India, experiences something near to a genocide during late 1946. To inculcate a nonviolent moral universe in that part of the world, Gandhi walks barefooted, miles after miles across Noakhali. Exposed to filth, thorns, and the biting chill, his feet fester and bleed. Tearful Manudi nurses his wounds, in the process training herself to be his devotee. For his part, Gandhi marches on, without a chappal lest he will tarnish Bumadevi (i.e., mother

earth) with impurity. Also, in deviance to a saint and a devotee relationship, Gandhi sets in motion a microcosm wherein he strips himself nude along with Manudi. Together, they initiate a third space,which anchors a transcendent norm beyond sexual aggression, that is so rampant then at Noakhali. Manudi, with the insistance of her mentor, keeps a detailed record of their microcosm, however incorrigible it may appear to the outsider (Kumar, 2006). Encouraged by her familiarity with the third space, Gandhi also coaxes Manudi to travel all alone in the riot-ravished arena of Noakhali. He even allows Manudi to play a mother's role when they are on a boat ride: he goes to sleep on her lap like an infant. Now, the young mother and the infant son are in a position to confront Noakhali genocide, head-on. After all, to the septuagenarian queer teacher, bare-feet on bumadevi, a nude moment with Manudi, an infant recline on her lap, and the like, appear one and the same. They emerge as sacred instances of personal transformation, or an entry into a third space, where one can come in direct contact with heterosexual violence that erupts from within, and beyond. To summarise, Gandhi's brahmacharya experiments with Manudi appear deviant since, first, they focus always on a nude self and, second, they deploy the same for arriving at a rhetorics of care that is again idiosyncratic in character. Apparently, Gandhi does not succeed fully in preparing Manudi for a plain encounter with heterosexual violence. Nor is she able to put herself bear in toto on paper for a posterity. However, the experiments do manage to install a secure space within, which can potentially guide her in deviating from a rigid heteronormative ideal.

Gandhi's contemporaries declare brahmacharya experiments as adharma (i.e., a disharmonious enterprise). For its part, feminist scholarship justifiably rejects certain elements of one-upmanship in the project. However, what stands out in the experimentation is the idea of a non-biased care ethic concerning sexuality. Such a Gahndian idea seems to reside within an androgynous ethos where one is free to travel through, between, and beyond a strict binary gender norm.

[Tanmoy] at the end of this section, I am not sure how this experiment with sexuality, whatever it may finally teach someone, is related to anything to do with disability. Is it that structural violence that is perpetrated because of male sexuality is also the cause for structural violence that is disability? But why should these be equated? The next section is more relevant to disability.

[Abhishek] There is hardly any disability perspective within Gandhi's ideas as such and it reflects in this paper too. One of the reasons I think we are discussing this is because the author happens to work in the area of disability studies. But I am not sure how these ideas are useful in Disability contexts. Take the example of sexuality. Disabled men are deemed asexual and that's a battle for a lot of disabled persons but here the focus is on sexualizing yourself in search for a spiritual quest which I wonder whether it can fit into the a perspective for those studying disability studies.

Leprosy, a selfhood of accommodation, and a care ethic of the abject and the disgusting

At Noakhali, an androgynous ethos aids Gandhi to understand and perhaps transcend heterosexual violence. All the same, he is still puzzled about the sort of things that drive people to exterminate a fellow human being given a permissive situation. In seeking an answer to the riddle, Gandhi begins to meditate on emotions such as abjection and disgust that go on to annihilate a 'leper-figure'. A will to stamp out the other, a typically imagined leper-figure seems to suggests, is driven by the idea that the unwanted is a heap of putrid flesh, needing abjection and disgust at their fullest.

To carry forward emotions such as abjection and disgust to a distructive end, and never repent for the same, one needs nothing but a moral fence against the hated person. Gandhi calls such fence-makers 'moral lepers' (Jagadisan, 1965). Moral lepers look for moral putrescence within a physical anomaly such as leprosy. Apparently, in imitating a moral leper, one may develop a tendency to see nothing other than moral filth beneath the skin, especially in an adversary. If moral lepers were to ban themselves, Gandhi reasons, lepers with a mere physical anomaly will gain a legitimate interpersonal space. So goes Gandhi's meditations on leprosy during his Noakhali sojourn, which also seem to implicate those who are adversarially connected to the ongoing genocide. But this is not all, for Gandhi's leprosy work extends beyond a comparative moral view. In fact, over decades his leprosy work reconfigures notions of abjection and disgust, in order that they can serve a nonviolent caring ethic.

In common parlance, abject connotes extreme wretchedness and debasement. At the realms of the ego, Julia Kristeva reasons, abjection will assume certain definite forms such as horror and revulsion . Accordingly, these emotions play a crucial part in an ego that is at its formative stages of development. During the pre-symbolic stage, for example, an ego rejects anything that appears as a threat to its integrity and autonomy. Also, in enacting a rejection drama, the ego takes to affect and not reasoning (Lechte, 2003). An equally aversive feeling, disgust operates beyond Kristeva's ego-centric arena. It manifests as a rejection emotion that concerns a specific object that can unriddably nag a sensory system such as the haptic. Apparently, disgust induces one to take a flight and, at times, forcefully remove that which threatens to pollute and contaminate (Miller, 1998). However sensory it is, disgust does not always give rise to an aversive physical symptom such as nausea. Also, it may find a place in an everyday idiom where judgements abound about the aversive.

Gandhi rejects both abjection and disgust as legitimate means to erase the aversive. He is also less persuaded by an idea that an ego's survival depends upon an ability to reject an object that threatens its autonomy. However, conceding to the view that abjection and disgust are a matter of affect, he pleads restraint in deploying them as a rejection tactic. For example, in preserving a goodness of its peripheries, an autonomous self may put in place abjection and disgust to keep away the aversive. In the process, selfhood can become shallow, interested only in guarding a goodness of its own making. To remedy this, Gandhi recommends a

cultivation of selfhood based on the idea of accommodation. In opening up itself for accommodation, Gandhi's radical selfhood not only breaks open a guarded boundary, but also makes itself available for negotiation with the aversive. In preparing himself for the aversive, Gandhi immerses into a sensorium of leprosy care so that he breaks open his much guarded periphery of selfhood, which is by and large shaped by a goodness filter involving abjection and disgust. Also, he voluntarily exposes himself to the culturally abject and disgusting about leprosy so that he can, first, open up his seemingly squeamish borders to the condition and, second, make leprosy care a test case of his preparedness for an accommodative nonviolence mission.

[Tanmoy] The idea of inclusion appears here in the form of accommodation, however, inclusion is mentioned only the very end within the context of DS.

We might take for example the kisan satyagraha procession at Champaran. Several satyagrahis (i.e., followers of 'truth force') march together in protest against oppression of farmers at Champaran. One of the satyagrahis is a leprosy patient. In the middle of the procession, the cloth bandage tied around his wounded foot tears open. With oozing blood and excruciating pain, the leprosy patient stops walking. Others march forward, unmindful of his pain. In fact, they fear and loath his leperous presence. On learning that the leprosy patient is absent for the evening prayer, Gandhi goes in search of him. After spotting him, Gandhi nurses the wounds, offers solace and comfort so that he is ready for the community event (Jagadisan, 1965). In this episode, and in many others involving leprosy, Gandhi drives home the idea that 'truth force' cannot transpire in abstraction. It will have to involve an ethos of accommodation so that those who are subjected to aversion find a place in it too.

[Tanmoy] 'truth force cannot transpire in abstraction' – much to say about this — it's the same belief that guides research in many fields where mere abstraction cannot reveal 'truth' apparently, but that is blatantly untrue – especially since 'ethos' means guiding principles or beliefs, in short, something abstract. Also, as I've mentioned several times in the past that most experiments in Science are thought experiments, i.e. in abstraction.

However, we must note the word 'transpire' here, i.e. for Gandhi what is important is that an action's validity is judged by not just initiation but its *passing through* another individual. But it can take place in abstraction, if not transpire.

Also, can one say that making space in one's mind is the first step in making physical space, i.e. accommodation? I think it's far more essential to make the mental space first and in fact treat it as a pre-condition. However, Gandhi's point is about thought that is driven by action, rather than the other way round. But when we apply this concept to the idea of inclusion, we need to reconsider that stance.

[Sharmishthaa] I believe the word 'accommodation' indicates physical and material changes and not the mental ones. Acceptance to my understanding, on the other hand, is more 'mind' oriented and accommodation is 'material' oriented.

[Tanmoy] accommodation in Gandhi in the context of leprosy is slightly guarded, (and as Nidhi said earlier), there is no total devotion to the other, at no stage is the own self given up. But true inclusion can only happen when one is mentally accommodating the other. Otherwise if it's only outward accommodation, it's only good behaviour and not true inclusion.

The directionality of action and intention is here important, it's not possible to evaluate intention by your action, does only good action indicate good intention? I am not sure about it. The other directionality issue that arises here is how's the disabled person accommodating the other?

In seeking to accommodate those who are deemed abject and disgusting, Gandhi also takes care to preserve their integrity; especially an inherent will to live, and self-anihilate, if necessary. His relationship with Parchure Shastri illustrates this very well. In 1932, Gandhi stays in Yeravada prison where Shastri also happens to be admitted in a cell allotted for lepers. Although he is forbidden to meet Gandhi, they have a regular letter correspondence. In one of the letters, Shastri explains to Gandhi that leprosy is becoming unbearable, and he wishes to end the misery by putting an end to his life. To this, Gandhi's answer is in the affirmative. He advises Shastri to go on a fast until death. An end this way will help him take control of his soul, and leprosy too that seem to take hold of his tabernacle of the human body (Jagadisan, 1965).

Shastri and his fellow-lepers undergo disgust. They experience taedium vitae (i.e., weariness of life). Decaying this way, they may by time face annihilation en masse. In recommending Samadhi maran, death by fasting, Gandhi reinstates the lepers' will over their lives, which appears hijacked by an aversive structure (Ganguly and Docker, 2007). But how exactly does Gandhi immerse himself in a sensorium of leprosy care to test the readiness of his selfhood of accommodation? He seizes every opportunity to be in closer proximity with the lepers. He nurses their wounds, exchanges food, and – in general – religiously takes to leprosy care as an instance of personal and ethical transformation.

[Tanmoy] I talked about this before. The first part of the above paragraph, given the impression that finally Hem is going to look at Gandhi critically, but by the end of the third sentence, he gives up. In fact, the kind of disjunction marker, 'But' at the start of the fourth sentence doesn't make sense, because it launches the discussion into a different topic. However way you look at this, 'Samadhi maran' cannot be condoned.

[Sharmishthaa] true, the idea that the best use of a deformed body is to come to an end for whatever good it may be, is indeed very problematic and echoes Peter Singer.

[Tanmoy] Also it's clear that Gandhi sees himself (and Hem sees it with him) as the 'provider' of care, from the leper, or any other marginality, but the other direction of care (see discussion at the beginning on this paper) never emerges here. What does the leper give him?

Amid religious overtones, leprosy-care also appears as a special cosmos in its own right. One can almost see this happening when Gandhi meets a convocation of lepers from a sanatorium at Chingleput. Gandhi's train stops for a while in Chingleput. Leprosy patients, around 700 in number, gather at the railway station to have a glimpse of the Mahatma. One of them, a girl with leprosy, offers a small sum to Gandhi as their humble contribution for the cause of untouchability. Deeply touched, Gandhi wakes up from a trance so that he is soulfully available to the lepers, all at once (Jagadisan, 1965). Later on, when Gandhi recollects the episode, he calls the leper convocation a temple. Now, in his worldview of caring, all the lepers seem like Hindu deities, available for an intense devotional dialogue at the realms of the conscience. With their darshan (i.e., a religious looking that transpires at the realms of conscience), Gandhi gets a glimpse of an ultimate care ideal that is beyond an aversive dynamic involving abjection and disgust. During the darshan, and thereafter, leprosy seems like a spiritual medium in which Gandhi can dissolve all possible inhibitions against the aversive. Thus, the Chingleput episode, and others involving leprosy, spiritually install in Gandhi a selfhood of accommodation that can treat abjection and disgust no more than the last of the defences that serve a selfhood of rejection.

[Tanmoy] words such as 'beyond' is exactly the reason I was suggesting the start that this view is very much in line with the whole 'divyangjan' logic – where disability is something 'beyond' being a human phenomenon or condition.

Kristeva acknowledges that societies seek recourse to rituals and positive symbolism to negotiate with the aversive, and so does Gandhi during his interactions with abject and the disgusting about leprosy. However, Gandhi's care ethic of leprosy inculcates the view that rejection affect and, by extension, abjection and disgust are not viable options to sustain selfhood. What also stands out in the Gandhian schema is a leprosy care ethic, which testifies to a selfhood of accommodation that needs neither abjection nor disgust for survival.

A vision of a non-violent selfhood based on care ethics of the corporeally vulnerable

Gandhi's crusade against violence has in its center an individual selfhood where structural frameworks such as heterosexuality animate, and perhaps gain legitimacy. In preparing a selfhood for peacebuilding, Gandhi is also on the lookout for ways and means with which he can strengthen it, and at the same time, guard against an aggressive individualist orientation. Individualist orientation, Gandhi realises, prompts people to narrow their boundaries, as much as the structures in which they are immersed. When such a thing happens, individuals and structures alike tend to withdraw from pursuing peace, and thereby become covert agents of violence. In searching for a remedy against individualisation, and its covert link to violence, Gandhi explores caring relationships involving the corporeally vulnerable.

For Gandhi, corporeal vulnerability comes across as a test case to understand, first, human resilience and a will to care for each other amid a structural impingement, second, their

capacity to transcend a violent normative view and, third, their preparedness to expand a selfhood with a motivation to accommodate, to neither avoid nor reject. During moments of voluntary identification with androgynous people, for example, Gandhi comes to know that a cultural infrastructure such as heterosexuality is guided by a violent streak despite a social legitimacy. Equally, nakedness and leprosy offer Gandhi insights concerning the shapings of selfhood, and its orientation amid an aversive and a hostile context. While nakedness seems to drive in the point that all a selfhood requires is a positive symbolism for an altruistic orientation, leprosy demands a selfhood of accommodation which is less squeamish about the figure of the other.

Gandhi's experiments with nonviolence, especially the ones that concern a selfhood's place in a hostile structure, draw on an ethic of caring. If not for bodily vulnerability, Gandhi reasons, humanity may inculcate a selfhood that is both omnipotent and unscrupulous about its borders. Equally, goodness too will find no conduit beyond individualism so as to become a transcendental value system. It may remain as a cerebral abstraction, an immanent thing that does not touch anyone, including its possessor. Immanently founded or transcendentally expressed, Gandhi's principle of nonviolence based on a care ethic of the corporeally vulnerable simply aims to make people available for others more generously. It is more of a politics of intention: one is expected to owe allegiance to nonviolence via a willingness to care for others in thought, speech, and action.

[Tanmoy] as suggested earlier the notion of the politics of intention here needs more discussion in the context of a disabled person who may not be the primary care giver but is willing to be one.

Whether or not nakedness, androgyny, and leprosy are disabilities as such is not important. They may become one, and slip the category, depending upon historical contexts. However, what may concern disability studies are nuances of a care ethic that such sites of vulnerability seem to propagate from within a Gandhian framework of nonviolence. First, the field may incorporate Gandhi's tactic of transcendence. An impasse involving a structural entanglement, for example, needs an entirely new approach, and not the ones that emanate from a current status quo. Second, disability studies can take on board Gandhi's politics of intention. Intentions shape an individual's immersion into, and a collisional course concerning an aversive structure. Third, Gandhi's view that corporeal vulnerability is an ideal site for a review of care ethics is in fact a selling point for disability studies. With a special insight into Gandhian care ethics, disability studies can place itself in the lead among fields that concern nonviolence and peacebuilding. And fourth, in doing so, disability studies may also take into consideration Gandhi's approaches to spirituality. Apparently, most of them are esoteric to his time and life. However, his spiritual approaches that concern a selfhood of accommodation may be useful to disability studies in evolving an inclusive normative agenda.

[Tanmoy] Finally, inclusion appears right at the end!

[Sharmishthaa] I really think it's a forced connection from accommodation to inclusion. Although in the conclusion, Prof. Hem has tried to solve the problem of the placement of 'disability' amongst the chosen corporeal vulnerabilities by suggesting to see beyond the historical context; but the question remains, that since leprosy during that time was not considered a disability and the fact that it was considered as a disease, a punishment by the divinity, sympathetically reading Gandhi, he could not have had any other way to deal with it, but as sympathy and pity. Thus his idea of accommodation is also coming from the notion of sympathy and pity and not acceptance or inclusion.

Gandhi's interaction with the vulnerable bodies in my opinion is an example of his political messaging through his social involvements which has been emphasised by many a scholars. So seeing Gandhi and his experiments without the historical context is not an option.

References

Gandhi, M. (1948). *Autobiography: the story of my experiments with truth,* Courier Dover Publications, Bombay.

Ganguly, D. & Docker, J. (2007). *Rethinking Gandhi and nonviolent relationality: global perspectives,* Psychology Press, Abingdon.

Hines, S. (2007). *Transforming gender: transgender practices of identity, intimacy and care*, The Policy Press, Bristol.

Jagadisan, T. (1965). *Mahatma Gandih answers the challenge of leprosy*, np, Madras.

Joshi, D. (2002). *Gandhiji on KHADI,* Mani Bhavan Gandhi Sangrahalaya, Bombay.

Kristeva, J. (1982). *Powers of horror,* Columbia University Press, New York.

Kumar, G. (2006). *Brahmacharya, Gandhi & his women associates,* Vitasta Pub., New Delhi.

Lechte, J. (2003). *Key contemporary concepts: from abjection to Zeno's paradox*, Sage, London.

Leeming, D. (2006). *Kamadhenu*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Miller, W. I. (1998). *The anatomy of disgust,* Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass.

Trivedi, L. N. (2007) *Clothing Gandhi's nation: homespun and modern India,* Indiana University Press, Bloomington.

Winnicott, D. W. (1971). *Playing and reality*, Psychology Press.

❐