

PAREL, ANTHONY, *Gandhi's Philosophy and the Quest for Harmony*, 2006, Cambridge University Press.

In this year of the centenary of *Satyagraha*, Professor Anthony Parel of the University of Calgary in Canada, has come out with another thought provoking and scintillating book on Gandhi after his last book *Gandhi, Freedom and Self-Rule*. His book presents an entirely new perspective on Gandhi's philosophy of linking the spiritual with the temporal. He writes that both are inexorably interlinked – the pursuit of desires and strivings like wealth, power, happiness etc with the spiritual quest for religious identity, truth and harmony.

This Parel achieves by analyzing the concept of the four *purusharthas* or the four aims of life – *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, and *moksha*. Gandhi believed that the pursuit of *purusharthas* is what gives human activities their basic meaning and purpose and that to understand the Indian civilization, one needs to start with *purusharthas*. The commentaries and interpretations on the *purusharthas* by Kautilya, Manu, Vatsayayana, Shankara and Ramanuja are referred to.

Gandhi's dynamic and wholesome interpretation on the *purusharthas* is also reconstructed. Parel writes: "There is an inner dynamism that brings the diverse elements into a fruitful relationship with one another and it is necessary to understand the nature of this inner dynamism..." According to him, the old way of looking at *purusharthas* in terms of mutually exclusive terms should be discarded in favour of the new approach which shows how the various elements may be made to work in an interactive and harmonized manner. This new approach is what is called the Gandhian paradigm and is the essence of Parel's book.

Gandhi emphasized that the pursuit of *moksha* and political life were closely knit and should be in tune with contemporary times. He felt that politics, economics and social reform were the best means of attaining *moksha* – the old means of renunciation of the world must be abandoned. Gandhi removed the distinction between saints and worldly people asserting that the pursuit of renunciation and worldly life are intertwined and could not be separated. Parel forcefully emphasizes this point in the first Chapter and tries to substantiate this claim in the rest of the book.

The book is divided into five parts – the first being mainly devoted to the Introduction and a general background about Gandhi's reconstitution of the four *purusharthas*. These are individually and in detail dealt with in the remaining four Parts – *Politics and Economics, Dharma, Pleasure and Spiritual liberation*.

Gandhi dealt with inclusiveness of the Hindu religion by his analogy with an oceanic circle to include people with different ethnicities, religions, languages and cultures within it. The ocean is large enough to accommodate different religions and cultures including the Hindu and Muslim religions. They can live together in harmony. This concept of Indian nationalism was unfortunately neither accepted by the staunch Hindus nor by Muslims especially Jinnah who insisted on a separate nation for the Muslims.

The chapter on Dharma dealing with the role of Dharma as duty, as religion and as ethics is brilliantly written and displays Parel's scholarship over Indian philosophy and Gandhian studies. Although the scriptures, including the Gita approved of the four *varnas* (castes), Gandhi did not hold one as superior to another. He likened these, as was done by the Rig Veda, to the parts of the body. How could one part be more important or superior to another? The body as a whole is made up of all the parts and could not sustain itself if one or the other parts were missing or dysfunctional. But Gandhi did confess that caste as it prevailed in society in India was a "hideous travesty" of the original ideal.

For Gandhi, being religious was a means of achieving the supreme purushartha. He believed that religion helps people in not only the elimination of ego and material interests, but their harmonization with the self and ultimately with moksha. He also distinguished between established and personal religions. Gandhi felt that all institutional religions are divinely inspired but imperfections had crept in because of man's limitations. He strove seriously to understand and remove these imperfections from Hinduism.

Parel also writes about Gandhi's understanding of Dharma as ethics or *ahimsa* which is the truest manifestation of ethical behaviour. For him truth and non-violence were indistinguishable. He wrote: "Truth is the end and *ahimsa* is the means thereto".

The Chapter on Celibacy and sexuality talks about the many facets that are already well known and have created a lot of controversy – for instance Gandhi's insistence that husbands and wives should abstain from sex after some stage etc. Also, Gandhi's actions in sleeping with young women when he was seventy years old to test his morality and spirituality. But these issues have been amplified in this book and should make them better understood and less controversial.

In the last chapter, the author writes about the many well-known aspects of Gandhi's firm and sustained belief in moksha and the Gita. Moksha supplied the force unifying all of Gandhi's activities and Gita played a decisive role in shaping his beliefs and actions. On the decline of the desire for moksha in modern India, Gandhi wrote that people had a 'superstition' that it could be attained only in the last stages of life. Those who deferred it until then would attain not self realization, but "a second and pitiable childhood living as a burden on this earth"

According to Parel, Gandhi's attempt at bringing the four purusharthas together was of utmost significance. In his words: "It put an end to the historic estrangement between the political and the spiritual. The separation of artha from dharma and moksha -- politics from ethics and spirituality — was at the root of India's political and economic stagnation."

Parel's book gives fresh insights into the complex nature of Gandhi and demonstrates how Gandhi continues to be of relevance in the contemporary world. Unfortunately the book has as yet been published only in UK and the West and is obviously steeply priced for readers of India and Asia. All of us will keenly await the cheaper Indian edition.

Ravi P. Bhatia
International Peace Research Association, IPRA