Chapter IV

Vegetarianism and the National Self:

Gandhi's Food as the Site of Anti-Colonial Struggle

4.1 Introduction

Stranded in a foreign land in 1888, 19-year old Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi faced a danger of physical starvation owing to his vow to his mother before leaving for England to become a barrister. The orthodox Modh Baniya Vaishnava lady made her son take a vow not to touch meat, wine and women during his sojourn in the foreign land. The young Gandhi had already relished meat earlier but as it amounted to lying to his parents, he decided that, "When they [parents] are no more and I have found my freedom, I will eat meat openly, but until that moment arrives I will abstain from it" (M. K. Gandhi 2011: 21). Gandhi, who was to later on boast of his unfailing Baniya instincts in all his transactions, took the vow without any hesitation. He had to face many obstacles for his impending travel to England and he succeeded in surmounting all of them. He could not have allowed her mother's conditions to come in his way as "the desire to go to England" (M. K. Gandhi 2011: 35) was uppermost in his mind. The vow paved the way to a new future and a new land. Perhaps, he did not realize that the vow would endanger his very survival. But the ordeal started right on the ship where Gandhi found it difficult to mix with people freely owing to his fear of English language and his vegetarian diet. The vegetarian diet consisted of sweets and fruits which he had brought along with him. An elderly person, on discovering Gandhi's vegetarianism, even challenged him that he would have to revise his resolve of not eating meat once the ship reached the Bay of Biscay. Gandhi survived the journey and ended up in London where his resolve to abstain

from meat was to come under test many times. In London, being a vegetarian brought its own share of problems for Gandhi:

> Everything was strange—the people, their ways, and even their dwellings. I was a complete novice in the matter of English etiquette, and continually had to be on my guard. *There was the additional inconvenience of the vegetarian vow.* Even the dishes that I could eat were tasteless and insipid. I thus found myself between Scylla and Charybdis. England I could not bear, but to return to India was not to be thought of. Now that I had come, I must finish the three years, said the inner voice. (M. K. Gandhi 2011: 42; emphasis added)

This initial bravado of taking a vow and keeping it in the memory of the mother and incurring difficulties in the process defines the personality of Gandhi during the early part of his stay in London. The *ad nauseam* reference about himself being a devoted and obedient son in early chapters of his autobiography attest to this strong influence of his parents. It is almost as if he fashioned his own self as an obedient son like Shravankumar of the text of the play *Shravana Pitribhakti Nataka*. The text of the play left an "indelible impression on my mind. 'Here is an example for you to copy,' I said to myself" (M. K. Gandhi 2011: 6). Yet as his career progressed, Gandhi moved beyond his 'self' as an obedient son and fashioned multiple 'selves' beginning from individual self, to social self, political self. This last self—political self—is the focus of this chapter.

This chapter looks at Gandhi's use of vegetarianism as a technology for constituting a 'self' which simultaneously operated at multiple levels. The chapter argues that Gandhi engaged with the concept of vegetarianism in different ways right from his early childhood and this engagement continued till the end of his life. The numerous articles in journals and newspaper, letters written to friends and strangers and of course the lectures delivered on the issue of diet covers quite a substantial portion of 100 volumes of his writings and speeches. This chapter will explore the trajectory of his ideational engagement with vegetarianism and its intimate relationship with his political

as well as social/personal life to argue that Gandhi's vegetarianism becomes one of the major sites from which he launched his anti-colonial struggle.

4.2 Childhood and the Challenge to the 'Self'

It is interesting to note that the first sentence of his autobiography is, "The Gandhis belong to the Bania caste and seem to have been originally grocers" (M. K. Gandhi 2011: 3). 55-year old Gandhi starts to trace his identity right into the matrix of caste. As mentioned above, he revelled in his Baniya identity time and again throughout his life. It can be assumed that this location of 'self' within the caste matrix gives a powerful sense of identification and belonging.

First hint of Gandhi's assertion of the 'self' which is different from the caste is when he talks about his falling prey to the lure of eating meat. As a student, Gandhi came into contact his elder brother's class mate Sheikh Mehtab. Gandhi made him a friend in 'spirit of reform'; that is Gandhi wanted to restrain Mehtab from the pursuit of bad habits and reform him. With Mehtab, the question of food enters into Gandhi's life in such a way that Gandhi could not help himself from addressing the question of food and diet throughout his life. His engagement with diet, like many others things in which he dabbled in or made important interventions, assumed enormous proportion in his life. Gandhi mentions that during his student days in Rajkot there was a wave of reform in the form of meat eating. The question of meat eating assumed an enormous importance as it came to be linked with standing upto the British. One of the colonial logic, extended in India was also of the beef-eating British governing the feeble and vegetable-eating Indians. To Gandhi's question of why meat-eating is getting popular, Mehtab answered, "We are a weak people because we do not eat meat. The English are able to rule over us, because they are meat-eaters" (M. K. Gandhi 2011: 18). Mehtab went on to elaborate the

great benefits of meat eating by giving his own personal example of being a well-built athlete. Mehtab's persuasions brought result over a period of time when Gandhi felt tempted to be like him and so he decided to taste meat. Apart from his sense of physical feebleness Gandhi also was acutely aware of his fears of darkness, thieves, ghosts and serpents. This awareness also played a role in his decision to taste the forbidden food. What is interesting here is another awareness that of being subject of a foreign rule. Young Gandhi felt that, "meat-eating was good, that it would make me strong and daring, and that *if the whole country took to meat-eating, the English could be overcome*" (M. K. Gandhi 2011: 19; emphasis mine).

This was the first glimpse of realization on Gandhi's part that he is a part of a country which is ruled by alien powers and they need to be removed and thrown out. Meat eating became the tool for fighting the British rule. In *Alimentary Tracts: Appetites, Aversions, and the Postcolonial,* Parama Roy notes this incidence and says that:

> Meat eating or a kind of culinary masculinity (to borrow a term from the Rudolphs) would nourish, in most literal sense, not just Indian resistance to British rule but an entry into modernity and a condition of postcoloniality (indeed the two objectives were quite compatible with each other), so that a newly muscular Hinduism could challenge and match a muscular Christianity or a muscular Englishmen on its own terms. (P. Roy 2010: 80-81)

Indeed, this modernity got reflected immediately in Gandhi when he identifies himself as Indian rather than a Modh Baniya or a Vaishnava. Caste gets replaced by state and citizenship. Food is the site where this shift from caste 'self' to a national 'self' takes place. Here the young Gandhi has to reject the traditional Indian 'self' of caste in order to enter into the realm of modernity. The modern nation beckoned him and he could not participate in the progress of nation to become a nation-state without partaking of meat which entailed foregoing his caste identity. At this point of time the two are incompatible. This rejection of the traditional 'self' also signalled the defiance against parental

injunctions and social customs. Before this utterance of Gandhi, there is no sense of his aversion or acceptance of the foreign rule either in his autobiography or other writings. Suddenly, the meat-eating makes him aware of his responsibility of fighting the British rule. Mehtab succeeds in his mission of introducing Gandhi to meat eating and after initial revulsion Gandhi develops a taste for it. Writing his autobiography some forty years after this incident, Gandhi terms it as bait. It can be argued that Sheikh Mehtab becomes the very symbol of modernity which tempted Gandhi and he succumbed to its charms and decided to renounce his traditional self and identify with the new self. Now having fallen into the snare of modernity, the only way Gandhi could reclaim his old 'self' was by publicly denouncing the very structure of modernity which alienated him from his own 'self'. But this was to happen later in life, most precisely in 1909 with the publication of *Hind Swaraj*.

But this episode of meat eating and nationalist fervour was short-lived one. It is interesting that the quickness with which this sense of a national subject arose in Gandhi, it vanished equally quickly at least in its outward manifestations. We find no further mention of such feeling in young school-going Gandhi in his autobiography. The modern 'self' brought its tension when the realization sets in that meat-eating entailed lying to one's parents and that was nothing less than a sin. As a solution to this tension, Gandhi chose a safer path of avoiding meat till the parents were alive. After their death there will be no need to lie and there will be freedom to do whatever he wishes. The exercise of the modern 'national self' had to to wait as long as the old order of 'self' is alive. Soon, Gandhi realized the limitations of his traditional 'self' when he decided to go to England. What followed was a complex negotiation between the tradition and the traditional 'self'. The following section looks at this negotiation in the background of Gandhi's decision to travel to England in order get a degree in law.

4.3 Transcending the Traditional 'Self': Decision to Go to England

The opportunity of going to England presented itself unexpectedly to Gandhi. It was a family friend, Mavji Joshi, who proposed it saying that a barrister-ship from England will take only three years as opposed to time consumed in India in acquiring a college degree and more importantly an England-trained Barrister Gandhi can make powerful claim over his father's *gadi* (position) or Diwanship. There is an interesting interplay of tradition and modernity in Mavji Joshi's suggestion. He was making a case for Gandhi to go to England to receive modern education but the end which he had in mind was to get the traditional "occupation of Gandhi's father" (M. K. Gandhi 2011: 33-34). This opens up the question of tradition/modernity contours of colonialism. A question could certainly be posed that how come the British colonial education system which was supposed to dismantle the structures of traditional occupation came to be seen crucial in laying claim to the same traditional occupation. To make a claim to the tradition, Gandhi had to pass through the test of modernity. In a curious way, the 'self' which needs to be nestled in its traditional place has to be refashioned in the modern mint of the Western education and that too in the colonial metropole. The contours of the traditional occupation were to be shaped in by modernity, symbolized in the British education system.

In his autobiography Gandhi recounts this saying that, "I jumped at the proposal and said that the sooner I was sent the better" (M. K. Gandhi 2011: 34). The idea of going to England, planted by Mavji Joshi, gripped Gandhi so much that he travelled from one place to another either to get the requisite permissions from different people or try to get some monetary help for travelling to England. This was a travel in the space of caste. Gandhi had to go to seek permission from family friends and caste elders. Without their permission, his own immediate family could not have allowed him to travel to England.

He convinced everybody and got the required permissions. His relationship to England at this stage can be gauged from the speech he delivered at his high school farewell in Rajkot where he hoped that some of the students of the school would follow his footsteps and go to England to get higher education and return to India to participate in the big reforms (*CWMG* vol 1: 1).

It is difficult to fathom what "big reforms" Gandhi was alluding to but, to express the hope that other young people would follow his footsteps does give a hint that Gandhi was fully aware of the importance of the travel to England not only for himself but for others in his community too. The 'reform' may be regarding the caste and community taboo on the travel abroad or it may be the rise of nationalism in India. In any case, Gandhi was pitted against virtually everyone who mattered in his community as they were all against his going abroad, even his mother allowed him to go only after he promised to abstain from meat, wine and women (M. K. Gandhi 2011: 36). Thus, the three coordinates - meat, wine and women - become the limits of 'self' for the mother and by extension for the 'self' marked out for a person belonging to Modh Bania community. But there is also an interesting interplay of tradition and modernity vis-à-vis the three coordinates of meat, wine and women. What the mother's vow indicates is that the physical/geographical boundaries of the tradition can be crossed only if the more important socio-cultural and religious taboos are observed diligently. Thus, Gandhi can travel to England provided he successfully implanted the 'notional' traditional coordinates on the physical/geographical landscape of modernity. If the three coordinates are removed then the boundaries separating tradition from modernity gets dangerously blurred. Rather, the tradition gets totally submerged under the onslaught of modernity. Hence, following Partha Chatterjee's formulation of inner/outer domain of national subjectivities (Chatterjee 1993: 6), it can be argued that Gandhi's mother and other caste

member were guarding the inner space of their tradition against the outer space of colonial modernity and its institutions. This can be successfully illustrated by the fact that Gandhi's difficulty did not ended with his mother. Later on in Bombay, it was with great difficulty that Gandhi was able to persuade people—elders of his caste—to allow him to travel to England. He was the first Modh Baniya to undertake the travel abroad (M. K. Gandhi 2011: 37). A shy and diffident Gandhi mustered all his courage and countered all the opposition by saying:

> I do not think it is at all against our religion to go to England. I intend to go there for further studies. And I have already solemnly promised to my mother to abstain from three things you fear most. I am sure the vow will keep me safe. (M. K. Gandhi 2011: 37)

This time it is Gandhi himself who tries to enact a cautious interplay of tradition and modernity. There is a palpable sense of a masculine assertion—but a very cautious one at that. Gandhi tries to de-link religious and non-religious spheres of life and activity. That is where the masculinity of this assertion lies. In a society where every single activity revolved around religion, this separation of travel abroad from the religious sphere was a sheer bravado. Not only the concept of travel abroad had been rescued from the religious tradition but it was also transposed into the secular sphere. Taking the argument further, the purpose of education was foregrounded as a counter to all religious taboos. Gandhi seems to be arguing that education abroad could not be considered as a threat to religion. Education is not a limiting coordinate of the caste identity so it could not be considered as a threat to the traditional order. The limiting coordinates of the tradition had been taken care of by the vows taken in front of the mother so, the path to modernity was open for Gandhi.

But even this logic of Gandhi did not satisfied the Head of the community and this constant refusal exasperated Gandhi so much that he bluntly said that he did believe that caste had any role to play in the matter of his travel abroad (M. K. Gandhi 2011: 38). It

was a marvelous achievement for Gandhi who till now was only a reticent person, at least in front of his parents and elders of the community. The very idea of travel to England gave him so much confidence that he decided to challenge the entire structure of caste. This episode clearly conflates tradition/modernity debate into caste/modernity debate. Here, 'caste' comes to anchor the tradition. To defy 'caste' rules, in such a scenario means, to defy the very structure of tradition. By his refusal to adhere to the caste orders, Gandhi, unwittingly, challenged the entire edifice of tradition. For his blunt denial to follow caste injunctions in the matter of travel abroad he was out-casted by the caste leaders but even that did not deter him. These obstacles in his desire to go to England allowed Gandhi find his voice in the community for the first time.

Thus, Gandhi moved from asserting his own 'self' in a small group of friends, parents and his wife to a larger canvas of caste and community. The moment when he was out-casted became a moment of transcending the caste and community-based identity to a more expansive modern identity. Although in his farewell address at the High School in Rajkot he did mention that people who were trained in England should come back to serve India through taking part in reforms, the idea of nationalism certainly did not play any role in his decision to go to England. In fact, later on, he recounted that when Mavji Joshi suggested the idea of travelling to England, he thought that not only would he be able to become a barrister but he would also be able to see England, "the land of philosophers and poets, the very centre of civilization" (*CWMG* vol. 1: 42). This can be read as a continuation of his identification with the superior British culture. His adolescent exuberance of fighting the British by eating meat took a back seat by 1888, the year he travelled to England. The shift in physical geography also coincided with the shift of Gandhi's 'self' vis-à-vis the social topography of his community. Both these shifts were larger in canvas. In order to get the sense of this great leap, it can be noted that in

1887 Gandhi had to go to Ahmedabad to appear for the matriculation examination and it was for the first time in his life that he had travelled alone. Now within a year, he made this great leap and decided to travel to England all alone at the age of 19. Similarly, in his social relationships, he kept to himself and rarely opened his mouth in front of the elders. But as soon as the question of going to England arrived, he plucked up as much courage as to defy the entire grid of caste and community to carry out his own determined plan of action. Here we do get a glimpse of future Gandhi who, when once resolved any act or plan of action, carried on in spite of all oppositions and hurdles.

Three years later, in 1891, Gandhi recounts these difficulties in his decision to travel to England. In an interview published in the *The Vegetarian*, a weekly journal of London Vegetarian Society, he uses the figure of Ravana as a trope to describe obstacles in his path. According to the epic *Ramayana*, the warrior prince and god incarnate Rama fought the demon king Ravana. As soon as Rama cuts Ravana's head, a new head used to spring in its place and again Rama had to repeat the action. Gandhi used this rich trope for the hydra-headed problems he encountered for travelling to England (*CWMG* vol. 1: 43). Eventually, as in the epic, Gandhi, like Rama, succeeded in putting off all obstacles.[1] But there is a paradox here. Rama fought Ravana to get back his wife Sita and travel back to his own country from exile. Gandhi fought the many-headed problems of caste, religion, monetary, diet and others in order to transgress the boundaries of his own country and travel to another country. In its rich symbolism, the traditional story has been invoked to convey the movement from the traditional order to a modern order.

[1] The invocation of the story of Rama may not be very surprising in the case of Gandhi as he considered Rama as the most perfect manifestation of all divine virtues and was in Rama that Gandhi found his moral and spiritual anchor. Again, here Rama is invoked as someone who conquered the demon king Ravana. Gandhi was taught to repeat the name of Rama (*Ramanama)* in his childhood by his maid servant Rambha as an antidote to his fear of darkness and ghosts. For a discussion on the significance of Rama and *Ramanama* in Gandhi's life, see Suhrud (2012: 117-128).

4.4 Crossing the Frontiers: The Travel to the Metropole

Gandhi boarded the ship SS *Clyde* on 4 September 1888. A lawyer friend from Junagadh accompanied him. The ship gave the first glimpse of the outside world to Gandhi, a world which was different from his own social, cultural and religious world. This sudden encounter again pushed him to his old timid self. He could not bring himself to enquire whether any dish was vegetarian or not. He avoided company and kept to himself (M. K. Gandhi 2011: 39). But it did not keep him from his conviction in his vows to his mother being questioned. His own companion Trayambakrai Majumdar as well as another British old man ridiculed his vows and expressed doubt whether he would be able to keep them for long without perishing in the process. Keeping to his vows became a test for him—a test which was so important that he would rather go back to India than fail. When confronted with the opinion that he would soon perish without meat, Gandhi replied firmly that "If it be found impossible to get on without it, I will far rather go back to India than eat meat in order to remain there [England]" (M. K. Gandhi 2011: 40). The statement seems innocuous but if seen in the light of the problems Gandhi faced and overcame in order to board the ship to England, the importance of the 'vow' could be better appreciated. It became a test of Gandhi's masculinity to keep his vow and he was determined to pass it at every cost. It could not have been otherwise in the light of Gandhi's eventual life and work. Gandhi saw his life as a *satyagrahi* – seeker after truth. He claimed to adhered to truth and also emphasized that only a proper 'man' (who possesses masculine ideas of bravery and self-control) can be a true *satyagrahi.* The first ship journey became an unconscious adventure in the exercise of masculinity and being a proper 'man'.[2] Even on the ship he asked English passengers to provide him with the certificate that he had not touched meat. But soon he realized that anyone could get such a

[2] For a discussion on adventure and 'manliness' in Gandhi, see Achar (2010: 342-359).

certificate and so resolved to not seek certification. He remarked, “If my word was not to be trusted, where was the use of possessing a certificate in the matter” (M. Gandhi 2011: 40)? The new-found self-confidence discredited the value of English certification and sought to be its own authentication. True ‘manliness’ do not require certification, it is self-sufficient and exists for its own sake.

The ship, as a location for adventure and the exercise of ‘manliness’, is an important space. Ship occupies the in-between space from one land mass to another land mass. Modern shipping, it can be argued, began around the same time as colonialism and expansion of European empire began. In fact, elaborate shipping enterprise began only to fuel the requirements of the colonial expansion. If voyage also represents adventure than ship is the space where this adventure plays itself out. The ship tests a person’s ability to be on his/her own, away from the network of his/her own social security embodied by society. Ship becomes a space where a person acquires a sense of ‘self’. In the case of Gandhi too, the ship was the space of adventure although in the covert sense. I argue that the ship allowed the field of adventure where Gandhi could test his ‘manliness’. Gandhi’s vow came into conflict with the world (although a limited world of the ship but nevertheless formidable). It was for Gandhi to exercise his ‘manliness’ to defeat this world in order to keep this vow. That Gandhi succeeded in his battle to keep his vow and thus his ‘manliness’ was the victory of truth—another feather in the onward march of *satyagrahi*. Vegetarianism is not a mere habit of food it is the locus which holds Gandhi’s masculine ‘self’. Also, it is a bond which keeps him tied to the traditional ‘self’ even though the ship takes him forward into the epicenter of modernity.

4.5 Vegetarian Restaurant and the Moment of Transformation

During his sojourns in London in search of a vegetarian restaurant in London, Gandhi found one in Farringdon Street and ate heartily for the first time since his arrival in England. The very sight of the restaurant, according to him, "filled me with the same joy that a child feels on getting a thing after its own heart" (M. K. Gandhi 2011: 44).[3] This sudden exuberance in young Gandhi was inevitable as it was preceded by a long period of gloom. Before he hit upon this restaurant, he used to travel for miles in order to find places where he can find cheap restaurants but all he could get was bread. He used to fill his stomach with bread and water but never felt satisfied (M. K. Gandhi 2011: 44). This change from not feeling satisfied to childlike exuberance on finding a vegetarian restaurant is that phase of Gandhi where he was still, as he may have called later in life, the prisoner of the palate. Later on in his life he came to reduce his food intake to bare minimum and kept on controlling the cravings of the palate. But in London, his finding this vegetarian restaurant is an important point of departure in his life and subsequently, we may say, in his later career as 'Mahatma' whose dietary instructions were followed by many faithful acolytes and millions of common people of India. Here at the vegetarian restaurant he came across Henry Salt's *A Plea for Vegetarianism* which he purchased and went in to the restaurant and had his "first hearty meal since my arrival in England. God has come to my aid" (M. K. Gandhi 2011: 45). The mention of God here, it can be argued, is not only for food but also for the fact that this moment changed his life in a very definite way because it was here that he purchased and read Salt's *A Plea for Vegetarianism* and a great change came over him:

> From the date of reading this book, I may claim to have become a vegetarian by choice. I bless the day on which *I had taken the vow before my mother*. I had all along abstained from meat in the

[3] This sounds almost like an exuberance befitting Romantic poets. Interestingly, P. B. Shelley, the early nineteenth century Romantic poet was a leading figure in the vegetarian movement in nineteenth century Britain.

> interests of truth and of the vow I had taken, but had wished at same time that every Indian should be a meat-eater, and had looked forward to being one myself freely and openly some day, and to enlisting others in the cause. The choice was now made in favour of vegetarianism, the spread of which henceforward became my mission. (M. K. Gandhi 2011: 45; emphasis added)

Very clearly Gandhi, here, marks this moment at the vegetarian restaurant as the epochal moment. The above quote shows that Gandhi's dietary nationalism shifted its site and makes a sudden leap from non-vegetarianism to vegetarianism. James D Hunt terms this episode as "a delicious moment of confirmation" (Hunt 2012: 19). In fact, it was a giant leap back home. Before reading Salt's book Gandhi wanted every other Indian to eat meat and himself looked forward to eating it someday. But Salt's treatise forced him to rethink his position. Till now, it was the concern for truth and filial devotion which kept him from eating meat. This keeping away from meat can also be read as not fulfilling the duty towards one's nation. Gandhi's nationalism was waiting for its career till the day both his parents pass away so that he could freely eat meat and fight the British for liberating his nation. Till now, his wish was that entire country becomes meat-eater so that every Indian could become strong and masculine like the colonizing British. The enemy can be defeated only when we become as powerful as the enemy and only then can there be a war of equals. The childhood dream of becoming a meat-eating nationalist gave way, at the vegetarian restaurant, to a determination to follow life-long vegetarianism. Also important in the above quote is the invocation of "vow" to the mother. This "vow" becomes an important trope in Gandhi's writings. This is a very important point in Gandhi's life as "tradition" embodied in mother's piety and wisdom turns out to be totally right. It is this "vow" to follow traditional wisdom which saves Gandhi from the Western/modern/colonial temptation of meat. This "truthfulness" of tradition becomes a recurring theme in Gandhi. In many situations of crisis, Gandhi remembers some childhood incident where he had to obey displeasing rules framed by the elders but those

rules turned out to be his saviours in the time of acute crisis. Parama Roy (2010) terms this incident of encountering the vegetarian restaurant and reading *Plea for Vegetarianism* as "a richly parabolic moment" for Gandhi, "a moment of conversion, confirming but also transcending his vow to his mother" (P. Roy 2010: 90). The vow to the mother becomes a life-long mission. What was once a sign of traditional bondage turned out to be the supremely liberating force not only from the colonial anxieties but also from the temptations/snare of Western civilization. This is also a moment where masculinity gets de-linked from its hitherto Western meat diet and is safely transferred into the traditional Indian vegetarian diet. This also allowed Gandhi to get an immediate entry into the order of physical masculinity and by implication into the order of nationalism which he craved for right from his childhood. The newly-formed national subject finds secure roots in the tradition. The tradition becomes the source of immense power and sustenance in place of weakness. The dietary freedom which Gandhi wished for after the death of his parents was his now. It was also a freedom from the colonial logic of British rule and for this reason it needs to be located in the larger picture of anti-colonial struggle against the empire.

There is a paradoxical dislocation of cultures here as far as Gandhi and his own cultural moorings are concerned. While he was located deeply within his own cultural milieu of vegetarianism, Gandhi strongly craved for meat after being initiated into it. He linked meat-eating directly to the liberation from the empire. Young Gandhi was ready to disown his own cultural norms concerning food and was mentally challenging the dietary taboos of his own community. It is the travel to the very heart of empire which brought him around to change his views on this matter. It is in the metropolitan capital that Gandhi abjures the idea of meat-eating forever and embraces vegetarianism which was, right from the beginning, an integral part of his own cultural self. This finding or re-

uniting with one's own cultural self is important in the case of Gandhi because it paves the way for detachment with the colonial cultural capital and reclamation of one's own cultural capital, be it dietary or, later on, sartorial choices. It is this slow reclamation of the cultural self which culminates in Gandhi's powerful critique of colonialism and colonial modernity in *Hind Swaraj*.

Coming back to that moment of experience in the vegetarian restaurant, it should be noted that it the reading of Henry Salt's book, *Plea to Vegetarianism,* which brings about life-altering avowal of vegetarianism in Gandhi. It is not only the reversal of location which is paradoxical here but also the agent which brought about this change. It is not an Indian or more specifically anyone from his own cultural roots who persuaded Gandhi to the logic of vegetarianism; it was his vow to his mother which kept him on this tenuous path of non-voluntary vegetarianism. In London, people from his own cultural background kept on persuading him to break his vow of vegetarianism and embrace meat-eating. In a way all these people were only confirming and consolidating Gandhi's earlier views on meat-eating. It took an English writer and reformer to bring Gandhi back to his own cultural moorings, at least in the dietary matters. It can be argued that Gandhi saw another West in Henry Salt. It was a West which was like his own East. This became later on a distinction which Gandhi made for himself when he had to look at the western civilization. According to Ashis Nandy, Gandhi divides western civilization into two: one which has left behind its religious moorings in pursuit of material wealth leading to horrendous crime in all corners of the earth, and other West which has still retained Christian mores of life and which lived the message of Christ on this earth. It is easy to see that Gandhi saw in Henry Salt the glimpse of the other West which he formulated later on. Gandhi, in Nandy's views, sought and made alliance with this other West in his struggle against the British rule in India. According to Gandhi only this West could

redeem the western civilization from its present state of fall. In his study of cultural history of vegetarianism, Tristram Stuart also notes this moment for its rich anti-colonial potential:

> Vegetarian had been for Gandhi a badge of colonial humiliation; he now converted it into a symbol of resistance. Reviewing his attitude to the ancient Indian custom he had been taught to despise, Gandhi now clung to them as an antidote to the malaise of Western civilization. (Stuart 2008: 425)

Salt's book brings him to the idea of ethical aspects of vegetarianism. Salt, in his treatise, discusses the objections raised against vegetarianism and refutes each of them. He advocates vegetarianism for its economic, moral, aesthetic, physical and utilitarian perspectives. Salt argues that a vegetarian diet is cheaper than a non-vegetarian diet and it is only the force of custom that forbids British families of low-income to try vegetarian diet (Salt 1886: 8-10). Salt forwards the moral argument in support of vegetarianism by pointing that slaughter houses are signs of human degradation (Salt 1986: 11). Interestingly, he says that hanging carcasses of animals from the butchers' shops are signs of lack of aesthetics (Salt 1886: 12). Then Salt considers the most formidable argument against vegetarianism—the question of physical strength. Salt points to the lack of coherence in this argument. He points to the two camps within non-vegetarian group: one support it as essential for physical strength and the other support it as essential to mental strength. In the process, these two camps also say that the opposite camp may do without meat. Salt points to this gap saying that both the camps have no scientific basis in favour of their arguments. He goes on to explain the point of physical strength by saying that "in all countries the mass of the peasantry live in robust health without flesh-meat, for the simple reason that they cannot afford to get it" (Salt 1886: 14). Similarly, to counter the argument of mental strength, he says that it is a "well-known fact that great writers have usually eaten little or no flesh-meat, especially when engaged on any literary work" (Salt 1886: 14). It is not clear how Salt reaches the conclusion on writers not eating meat while

engaged in their literary work; he depends on the experience shared by members of the vegetarian society. Salt's may also have depended on the fact that some of the well-known creative artists such as Shelley and George Bernard Shaw were avowed vegetarians. Salt does not stop here but also attempts a rather spurious scientific explanation of physiognomy. He argues that the structure of human body is more akin to herbivorous animals rather than carnivorous animals and so it becomes imperative that man should become a complete vegetarian. This marshaling of science in his argument can be linked to the post-Enlightenment European society where truth was supposed to be enshrined in science. What cannot be proved by science cannot have the status of truth. According to Salt, it is this lack of scientific thinking which has kept man a slave not only to meat-diet but also to unwanted and unscientific traditions and customs:

> They greatly prefer the easier and more expeditious method of shaping their ideas in accordance with the time-honoured tradition of custom and "society;" and hence, on the subject of food, they cling firmly to the notion that the roast beef of England is the *summum bonum* of dietetic aspiration. I believe that time will prove this to be a fallacy, and that future and wiser generations will look back with amazement on the habit of flesh-eating as a strange relic of ignorance and barbarism. (Salt 1886: 20)

Thus, Salt marshals economic, moral, aesthetic, physical as well as scientific reasons in support of vegetarianism and as seen by his assertion in the above quotation, he firmly believed that vegetarianism was the future of the world. His constructed utopia was a vegetarian one and sooner the world gets out of its ignorant and barbaric custom of meat-eating, the better.

As discussed above, Salt's treatise allowed Gandhi to re-claim his own cultural milieu as a badge of honour. What is more interesting aspect of Salt's treatise was that it reversed the order of science and superstition; and tradition and modernity in relation to the colonial logic of binary. In Salt's argument, non-vegetarianism was the reason of

superstitious clinging to tradition and custom whereas the scientific evidence shows that it is vegetarianism which is the real food. This allowed Gandhi to challenge the colonial formulation of tradition and modernity. Gandhi, through Salt, realized that his own tradition and custom was really scientific and modern and worth emulating whereas what was portrayed by colonial modernity was nothing but an ignorant traditionalism. By Salt's scheme, Gandhi was able to assert the superiority of 'Indian culture' over the colonial British culture.

Salt's treatise had a far more powerful impact on Gandhi. From considering diet as a matter of filial devotion or national duty, Gandhi came around to see vegetarian diet as an ethical philosophy of life on earth. Like all his passions, vegetarianism gripped him and he found out and read other available works on vegetarianism. He mentions books such as Howard Williams' *The Ethics of Diet*, Dr Anna Kingsford's *The Perfect Way in Diet* and works of Dr. T. R. Allinson (M. K. Gandhi 2011: 45). Gandhi confides that his reading of such books did worry his friend in London. Gandhi writes about the anxiety of this friend:

> When he came to know that I had begun to interest myself in books on vegetarianism, he was afraid lest these studies should muddle my head; that I should fritter my life away in experiments, forgetting my own work, and become a crank. He therefore made one last effort to reform me. (M. K. Gandhi 2011: 46)

This again is a very interesting episode which brings in another set of role-reversals. This can be juxtaposed with Sheikh Mehtab episode in young Gandhi's life. In the case of Sheikh Mehtab, it was Gandhi who considered himself a reformer. The issue was meat-eating. Gandhi made friendship "in the spirit of a reformer" (M. K. Gandhi 2011: 17). He made Sheikh Mehtab his friend despite repeated warnings by his mother, brother and wife. He thought that he would be able to reform Sheikh Mehtab through the spirit of friendship. As it turned out, it was Sheikh Mehtab who 'reformed' Gandhi of his

vegetarianism and made him taste meat and relish it. The reformer Gandhi found himself 'reformed' into becoming a meat-eater. Although he had to set aside this reform after initial steps for the reasons of his truth and filial piety, the idea was very much there with him. Travel to London brought this culinary reform to a full circle by coming to the point of origin. Gandhi's reading of Henry Salt and other authors on vegetarianism brought him back to vegetarianism and this coming back had another encounter with new reformer. This time it was his friend and companion in London who donned the role of a 'reformer' and tried to reform Gandhi out of his vegetarianism. As Gandhi notes in the above-mentioned quotation, this friend thought of Gandhi's reading of vegetarian texts as a frivolous activity and wasting of time so he set upon making one last attempt to reform Gandhi. He took Gandhi to a restaurant which served non-vegetarian meal thinking that in such an atmosphere Gandhi will have no option but to eat meat but Gandhi managed to get out of the restaurant without eating anything. Where Sheikh Mehtab succeeded in tempting Gandhi to meat-eating, this friend failed in his act of reform and Gandhi succeeded in overcoming the temptation. Salt's treatise made him very clear that the role of a 'reformer' is always the privilege of the 'vegetarian'. It is the non-vegetarianism who are in the need of reform. In fact, later on in South Africa, Gandhi suggests the formation a missionary like band of vegetarians who can travel to different parts of the world and study the conditions of the place to see if the place is conducive to the growth of vegetarian propaganda (*CWMG* vol. 1: 292). He sent this suggestion to the weekly journal *The Vegetarian* which was the mouthpiece of London Vegetarian Society. Gandhi came in contact with this society during his stay in London and he involved in their activities in a profound way. In the process, he discovered a new sense of 'self'. The following section discusses his association with London Vegetarian Society and fashioning a 'national subjectivity'.

4.6 Gandhi and the London Vegetarian Society

While in London, Gandhi got hold of different writings on vegetarianism which he could get and pursued the subject with new-found enthusiasm. He found the "religious, scientific, practical and medical" (M. K. Gandhi 2011: 51) reasons for embracing vegetarianism. The ethical dimension of the argument appealed to him much. Then he came across the London Vegetarian Society through its weekly journal *The Vegetarian* (this journal turned out to be first public platform for Gandhi's writings). Gandhi subscribed to this weekly journal, pursued the articles diligently and understood the arguments presented in favour of vegetarianism from all angles. Later on, he gained an entry into the Society and soon became a member of its Executive Committee (M. K. Gandhi 2011: 52). It was here at the Vegetarian Society that Gandhi found his voice and in the process his own 'self'. He liked the Society so much that he started a vegetarian club in his own locality with Dr Oldfield as President and Edwin Arnold as Vice President. Gandhi became the secretary of this short-lived club. But, by own admission, this exercise accorded him a valuable lesson in organizing and managing institutions (M. K. Gandhi 2011: 55). Indeed, it can be argued that managing a vegetarian club has been mapped onto the act of managing a nation-wide political party. Gandhi may be said to be bringing the effort to preserve the cultural and spiritual ethos on the same plane as of the political ambition of national independence. As a member of the Executive Committee of the Vegetarian Society, he came in contact with wide array of radical elements of the Victorian society. Although he was still plagued by shyness at giving public speeches, he found a new public self in the cause of vegetarianism. Parama Roy contrasts his meat eating experience in India with that of turning vegetarian with conviction:

> If the meat-eating of Gandhi's youth had been marked by secrecy, reserve, and the guilt of filial violence, vegetarianism was invested with a distinctly different set of affective lineaments. Vegetarianism's import has a great deal to do with its status as the vehicle of Gandhi's entry into

> public life during his student years in London. But what is equally if not more significant is the sense that the vegetarian body was, initially in England but later in India as well, a body characterised by its hyperbolic visibility. It was a body characterised by its looked-at-ness and its status, first as freak and then as holy spectacle. (P. Roy 2010: 83)

At this point it is worthwhile to notice that last decades of the nineteenth century England was a site of debate on vegetarian and non-vegetarian diet whose antecedent goes back to the end of the eighteenth century. The first vegetarian society was established in Manchester in 1847. It sought to bring health, peace and happiness in the world (Gregory 2007: 1). Although, as the name suggests, vegetarian society was mainly concerned with the food habit of Victorian England, they used vegetarianism as a concept or world-view to intervene in diverse range of political and cultural question in Victorian society such as:

> relationship of man to animals, and for violence between humans (thus vegetarians were often against war, against capital punishment and violent punishments in general), and also had things to say about the role of women from unpleasant kitchen duties. (Gregory 2007: 1)[4]

Although it was considered to be a fringe movement, vegetarianism invited lot of attention not less for the fact that many prominent personalities of Europe and America such as Leo Tolstoy, George Bernard Shaw were vegetarians.[5] As discussed above, these were the people who formed the part of the 'Other' West for Gandhi. Such influences forced Gandhi not only to rethink the idea of Englishness but also that of his own "Indianness and of his own more privileged relationship to it" (P. Roy 2010: 92). For the first time, his Indianness accorded him a pride of place in a totally western setting. He

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[4] Gregory also argues that vegetarianism did not prove to be a radical critique of Victorian society. In a way, it actually fitted well into the mode of Industrial production. The vegetarians emphasis on 'thrift and economy' actually played into the hands of capitalist owners who could use this argument against giving proper wages to their workers (Gregory 2007: 2). It will be important to remember that 'thrift and economy' was also a guiding principle of Gandhi and Gandhian ideology. Gandhi's relationship with the industrialists in India has remained a source of contestations. In an recent article, Arundhati Roy presents a devastating critique of Gandhi's relationship to Birlas, Bajajs and Sarabhais—all leading industrial houses of India from early twentieth century. See A. Roy (2014).

[5] For a book length discussion on vegetarian movement in Victorian England, See Gregory (2007).

was invited and honoured and came to be considered as the spokesperson on things Indian. This new Indian 'self' delighted in explaining different cultural aspects of India such as food, festivals etc. Again, in a moment of great leap Gandhi, who till that time never saw any other part of India except the Bombay province, came to become an expert on Indian culture.

As a member of of the Executive Committee of London Vegetarian Society, Gandhi was called upon to write about prevalent vegetarianism in India for the weekly journal *The Vegetarian*. The first article he wrote was carried in 7 February 1891 issue of the journal. It was titled as "Indian Vegetarian – I" and it marked the beginning of a writing career for Gandhi which resulted in 100 volumes of collected works. He wrote six articles on the topic "Indian Vegetarian," three articles on "Some Indian Festivals" and one article on "The Foods of India".

The series of articles on vegetarianism in India looks at different issues such as who in India fits the label of vegetarian, ways of preparing a common meal, the physical constitution of an Indian vegetarian, the average shepherd in India, his meal and his daily routine and pondering over the causes of week physique of Indians. This series marks the continuous journey of dietary concerns of Gandhi. These writing allowed him to engage with his childhood concerns of feeble vegetarian Indian and mighty meat-eating Englishman. He got an opportunity to challenge this colonial construction of masculinity and posed, in contrast, a vegetarian masculinity in the form of a common shepherd of India. The shepherd, for Gandhi, becomes such an important site for presenting and elaborating a cultural counter to the masculine ideals of the British Empire that he devotes three articles on Indian shepherds detailing his physical constitution, diet, daily routine, leisure and also his weakness (which does not affect his masculinity in any way). He writes:

> the shepherds in India afford a good example of how strong an Indian vegetarian can be where other opposite agencies are not at work. An Indian shepherd is a finely build man of Herculean constitution. He, with his thick, strong cudgel, would be a match for any ordinary European with his sword. Cases are recorded of shepherds having killed or driven away tigers and lions with their cudgels. (*CWMG* vol. 1: 24)

Here it is the masculine shepherd who is the finest specimen for Gandhi. He posits this shepherd after careful deliberation on the masculine qualities of different groups of people in India. Gandhi's project here is not a case of simple masculinity but it is to find a vegetarian masculine ideal which matches upto the non-vegetarian British masculinity. It is vegetarianism which accords the shepherd this pride of place in Gandhi's order of ideal Indian masculinity. Gandhi does consider the so-called martial races of India, Kshatriyas, and rejects them on the logic that many members of these so called martial races eat meat but have never touched sword in their entire life. Where martial races of India fail, the simple shepherd became the icon of Indian masculinity. It can be argued that Gandhi's choice of shepherd as a representative of vegetarianism is not entirely his original idea. As mentioned above, Salt, while making his case for vegetarianism, pointed that peasantry across the world is the sign of physical strength and that they are almost always vegetarians. Gandhi's borrows, it seems, Salt's idea and posits shepherd as the specimen of Indian vegetarian. But positing this vegetarian shepherd was not a simple exercise for Gandhi as he was aware that his shepherd was considered to be masculine only because of his brute force which in turn was the result of his living in the natural state of being. Gandhi had to ward off the colonial argument about the intellectual capacity of the shepherd. This is where Gandhi seems to have conceded ground to the popular nineteenth century concept of muscular Christianity which propagated the ideals of a healthy muscular body and sharp intellect. But Gandhi wriggled himself out of this situation by arguing for comparative analysis of same class of specimen of both the cultures: Indian as

well as British. He argued for comparing the physical strength of vegetarian Indian shepherd and non-vegetarian English shepherd.

As noted above Gandhi's positioning of Indian shepherd as a fine specimen is tenuous as he is trying to mimic the British masculinity but via an alternative route. He falters in his formulation very soon. In the very next paragraph in the same article, he opines that:

> Eat what food you will, it is impossible, it seems to make physical and mental strength go together except, perhaps, in rare cases. The law of compensation will require that what is gained in mental power must be lost in bodily power. A Samson cannot be a Gladstone. (*CWMG* vol. 1: 25)

Here it is clear that in trying to wriggle himself out of the colonial formulation, Gandhi falls again by making this distinction between bodily strength and intellectual strength and emphasizing that the two cannot go together. This colonial logic was all pervasive in India where Bengali babu became the subject of much ridicule for his apparent effeminacy resulting from his intellectual labour. The 22-year old Gandhi was anxious to form an alternative to colonial reasoning; nevertheless he fell within the same logic. Moreover, this can be easily read as Gandhi's life-long defense of *Varnashram* in Hindu religion which, according to him, was based on the division of labour.[6] Here, he seems to be giving a similar kind of logic. A person who is supposed to be engaged in hard physical labour cannot be expected to indulge in intellectual pursuits. Similarly, a person given to the life of minds must not be expected to to equally good in physical strength. At a deeper level, this assertion comes across as an apology masquerading as virtue. The lack of intellectual capacity of the Indian shepherd becomes his virtue as it has been compensated in his ample physical strength. Of course, later on, he will go on to demolish

[6] The most famous critique of this position comes from Ambedkar who said that caste system is not only a division of labour but it is a division of labourers.

the entire logic of colonialism by rejecting its very source of origin, that is, the idea of modern civilization all together.

In his third article on vegetarianism, published on 21 February 1891, Gandhi gives almost an anthropological account of how the Indian bread is prepared. In the same article, he unwittingly reflected on the effects of colonial rule on the Indian diet and is anxious to preserve a domain which is untainted by the colonial invasion. He writes:

> Now the question may be asked, "Has not the British Rule effected any change in the habits of the Indian people?" So far as the food and drink is concerned "yes", and "no". No, because *ordinary men and women have stuck to their original food and the number of meals. Yes, because those who have learnt a little bit of English have picked up English ideas here and there,* but this change too—whether it is for the worse of for the better must be left for the reader to judge—is not very perceptible. (*CWMG* vol. 1: 22; emphasis added)

An apparent anthropological observation hides the anxiety that refuses to attribute any agency to the colonial rule in terms of dietary habits of the Indians. Even the minor changes which might have occurred have been dismissed as negligible. This is the first instance where Gandhi posits ordinary Indian vis-à-vis English-educated Indians. This binary was going to be a constant trope in entire Gandhian discourse. Anticipating his later formulation in *Hind Swaraj,* Gandhi in 1891, posits that British colonialism occurred because English-educated elite became infatuated with the superiority of the colonial culture. It is the ordinary Indian, untouched by English-education, who is free from the yoke of colonial rule and its effect.

Gandhi not only positions an ordinary species of Indian vegetarian as against the British meat-eating model but he also subverts the colonial hierarchical binary of meat-diet/vegetarian diet by taking the question of food into ethical realm of respect for life of any and every living being. This allows him to pose the superiority of Indian

vegetarianism not only over the British non-vegetarianism but also over the British vegetarianism:

> an Indian vegetarian is quite different from an English one. The former simply abstains from anything that involves the destroying of life, or a would-be life, and goes no further. Therefore he does not take eggs, because he thinks that in taking an egg he would kill a would-be life. (*CWMG* Vol 1: 36)

Like Salt, by drawing attention to the killing of a life Gandhi makes diet a huge ethical question which has a direct bearing on day-to-day life. The superiority of the Indian vegetarian is complete and there is nothing which can much upto him in Britain. Vegetarianism involves not mere action but thought too. Not indulging in physical killing is one thing, the more appropriate behaviour is to abstain from harming anything which may produce life later on. The impact of Jain cultural milieu in Gujarat is clearly evident here. Jainism decries violence not only in action but also in thought. One should not even entertain any thought of violence. The above quotation is from a speech Gandhi delivered at the congregation of the Vegetarian Society at Portsmouth in May 1891. Till now, in his articles on "Indian Vegetarians" he was trying to provide an informative account of the vegetarianism in India. But at this meeting, Gandhi seems to be challenging the entire gamut of British society through the question of diet. Further, he slyly offers a short critique of British colonialism in India by pointing that although British rule over India is around 150 years old, still the colonial officials knows virtually nothing about the food of India. The exclusivity which British officers in India maintains comes in for sharp reaction (*CWMG* Vol 1: 37).[7] The new-found confidence is reflected when Gandhi says that following his "imperfect sketch" of Indian food, the audience will henceforth will take more interest in the matters of Indian food. This confidence allows Gandhi to hope

[7] Gandhi's observation of British officials lack of interest in Indian culture echoes an unlikely British official and explorer, Richard F Burton. Writing almost forty years before Gandhi, Burton too makes the same claim in is text *Falconry in the Valley of Indus*. For a discussion of this text and its anthropological gaze, see Chapter I of this thesis.

for the dissolution of the hierarchical boundaries between Britain and India and pines for unity of both the countries:

> I further hope the time will come when the great difference now existing between the food habits of meat-eating in England and grain-eating in India will disappear, and with it some other differences which, in some quarters, mar the unity of sympathy that ought to exist between the two countries. In the future, I hope we shall tend towards unity of custom, and also unity of hearts. (*CWMG* Vol 1: 40-41)

Vegetarian diet does not remain a question of food but it becomes the site of cultural equality and friendship. The personal hospitality and acceptability which Gandhi received at the London Vegetarian Society has been transposed onto the national topography. It is indeed a grand project which Gandhi envisages for the henceforth journey of vegetarianism in Britain. Indeed Gandhi believed in this project so much that even three years after leaving England, he sent a letter to the *The Vegetarian* from his new country of work, South Africa. The barrister Gandhi addressed the letter to Indian students in England and advised them to join the Vegetarian Society. Of the many reasons he gave for his advice, one was, "The vegetarian movement will indirectly aid India politically also, inasmuch as the English vegetarians will more readily sympathize with the Indian aspirations (that is my personal experience)" (*CWMG* vol. 1: 125). The will to create the alliance with the 'Other' West is too strong and so is the belief that it is vegetarianism which will be crucial to this alliance. Hunt reads this communication to Indian students as beginning of the quality of leadership in Gandhi:

> This communication, which displays the sense of leadership beginning to develop in the young graduate, offers a variety of pragmatic and political reasons. Vegetarianism will be useful because it will acquire friends for India and will show Indian parents that more sons can be sent to England for study. It also suggests a spiritual dimension, as organized vegetarianism offers a community of support for "those who never depend for their existence on the blood of the fellow-creatures. (Hunt 2012: 28)

The important of vegetarianism in the cause of nation cannot be overstated in the case of Gandhi.

There is another important angle to the opposition to vegetarianism in Europe. Its opponents equated it with the feminine diet. Meat was considered as a masculine diet. This masculine/feminine binary held a special charm for Gandhi as he privileged the feminine over masculine and strove for, according to Ashis Nandy, an androgynous 'self'. Parama Roy reads the culinary theatre of Gandhi in London as "the site for the staging of ethical dilemmas of long standing" (P. Roy 2010: 87). He further remarks that proponents of vegetarianism like Tolstoy were, "among the most fervent critics of the project of modernity, especially of industrialization, urbanization, and secularization and the refashioning of sexual ideology, bodily discipline, and gendered behaviours these developments brought" (P. Roy 2010: 90). Apart from Tolstoy, Edward Carpenter and John Ruskin too made scathing critique of all aspects of modern civilization. Gandhi's critique of entire Western civilization in *Hind Swaraj* borrows directly from the insights of these authors.

Parama Roy borrows the term "minor transnationalism" from Francoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih to characterize Gandhi's encounter with a whole gamut of vegetarians. Minor transnationalism operates differently from more publicized encounters of metropolitan and marginal subjects (P. Roy 2010: 91). Roy further comments that, "From aspiring to a condition of gastropolitical mimic manhood he had come to be linked in unlikely fellowship with the denizens of a global community marked by anti-modern and sometimes anti-imperial critique" (P. Roy 2010: 92). Roy's conclusion can also be read as Gandhi's aspiration to move from a more parochial cultural space to an international collaboration in the realm of both politics as well as ethics. Vegetarianism was going to be Gandhi's international community of believers. Arguing in the same vein, Stuart says

that Gandhi saw "vegetarianism as a bridge to unite the people of East and West" (Stuart 2008: 425).

Vegetarian society gave an abiding identity to Gandhi which he wore as a badge of honour throughout his life. Indeed, as can be seen in the discussion above, it became the training ground for Gandhi in the political act of far-reaching consequences. So deep was his bond with the Society that he remarked on the eve of his voyage back home that, "I carry one great consolation with me, that I shall go back without having taken meat or wine, and that I know from personal experience that there are so many vegetarians in England" (*CWMG* vol. 1: 49). London made him aware of a totally new kind of vegetarianism. Leela Gandhi in her book *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought and the Politics* offers a reading of Gandhi's encounter with the vegetarians in London as an instance of friendship which played an important role in Gandhi's political life. She has argued that the seemingly disparate strands of vegetarian society in England "zoophilia, anticolonialism, affect, the simplification of life, class critique, socialism, cosmopolitanism, kinship, and anarchism" can be easily read through the Gandhian lens of ahimsa or non-violence (L. Gandhi 2006: 114). According to her:

> However much we might underestimate the role of Gandhi's English vegetarian companions in his political formation, there can be no doubt that they were instrumental in freeing him at the very least of his specifically dietetic colonial anxieties, and too of defying the physiognomic basis of imperial argument. (L. Gandhi 2006: 83)

Gandhi left England in 1891 with a degree of law in hand and the spirit of a vegetarian missionary. The mission's new geography was not to be India but South Africa, another subject-colony of the colonial Britain and Holland.

4.7 Vegetarianism as a Mission: The South African Phase and Development of the 'Self'

Gandhi's vegetarianism entered a new phase in South Africa.[8] South Africa turned out to be Gandhi's laboratory in public and political leadership. Right from the beginning a sense of adventure marked his career in South Africa. When the occasion came to leave India, Gandhi was more than happy for it. The restlessness, the hallmark of explorers and adventure-seekers, seems to have rubbed Gandhi after his three-year stay in England. Regarding his impending travel to South Africa, Gandhi writes in his autobiography that he "wanted somehow to leave India. There was also the tempting opportunity of seeing a new country, and of having new experience" (M. K. Gandhi 2011: 94-95). In *Satyagraha in South Africa*, he notes his love for "novel experiences" and seeing "fresh fields and pastures new" (M. Gandhi 2008: 37). There is an unmistakable sense of excitement in Gandhi's assertion for this travel and all that it may entail (Achar 2010: 355). Indeed, the travel and exploration in South Africa proved to be both literal and metaphorical for Gandhi. A brief-less (and clue-less) lawyer went to lead a major political movement in South Africa. What was intended to be a stay of one year in 1893 stretched to twenty-one years. My point of interest in Gandhi's South African phase is his treatment of vegetarianism and the trajectory it took in Gandhi's manifestly political life.

In South Africa where Gandhi came into radical conflict with the political power of British colonialism, the idea of vegetarianism kept on recurring in his writings. Each time he wrote on vegetarianism, he linked it to the social, political, economic or cultural condition of either the colonizers or the colonized. With Gandhi, vegetarianism embarked on its African journey. The importance of food and vegetarianism in Gandhi could be gauzed from the fact that when he prepared a short writing entitled *London Diary* in order

[8] Gandhi went to South Africa in 1893 on the invitation of Dada Abdullah and Co. for assistance in a legal case. Before embarking on this journey Gandhi tried and failed in his legal practice in India on account of many reasons.

to help those Indian students who wanted to go to England for study, a major portion of this diary – around 20 out of total 55 – has been devoted to the discussion on vegetarian diet. He laments the fact there is prejudice and ignorance on the subject and he proceeds to counter all that:

> I earnestly beseech the reader to dismiss from his mind all premeditated ideas, all prejudice, and he will, I am sure, see for himself that without entailing any loss of health, but rather keeping it up, he would find 9s sufficient for food per week. (*CWMG* vol. 1: 86)

Like a propagandist, he goes on to demonstrate why and how it is possible to live 'healthily' in London economically. He counted examples of famous personalities who were vegetarians in England and who lived on minimum economic cost to their food. The influence of Salt's argument in *A Plea for Vegetarianism* is unmistakable in *London Diary*. Indeed, Gandhi advises the readers to read Salt's treatise along with other books on vegetarianism which Gandhi had read in England (*CWMG* vol. 1: 91). Like Salt, Gandhi's economic diet based itself on science in addition to morality. When Gandhi discounts the cost of tobacco or beverages such as tea or coffee, it is based on the ill-effects of these products. Those who insisted on the importance of these products suffered from prejudice and ignorance. There was no scientific basis to their argument. The same scientific reasoning is extended for removing wine from the food (*CWMG* vol. 1: 90). This also gave an opportunity to Gandhi to emphasise that it was possible to lead a purely Hindu life in England and no student should have any fear on that account. On the sly, he also pokes fun at the over-scrupulousness of caste Hindu elders as well as students in the matters of religious habits regarding food saying that not many students have either time or inclination to follow all religious ceremonies even in India (*CWMG* vol. 1: 93). Having faced trouble in his journey to England regarding food, Gandhi is making a strong case so that no other student should face the similar unnecessary problem.

Very early in Gandhi's stay in South Africa, he wrote to *The Vegetarian* weekly in London giving accounts of his exploits in securing a 'convert' although an uncertain one:

> I am glad to say I have been able to induce my land-lady, who is an English woman, to become a vegetarian, and bring up her children on a vegetarian diet, but I am afraid she will slide down. Proper vegetables cannot be had here. Such as can be had are very dear. Fruit, too, is very dear; so is milk. It is therefore very difficult to give her a sufficient variety. She would certainly leave it off if she finds it more expensive. (*CWMG* vol. 1: 65)

There hope and pessimism finds equal place here. But it can be argued that Gandhi thought that vegetarian could make a definite mark if it could be made cheaper. It should be remembered that proponents of vegetarians made economic scruple an important point in their argument. Also, in this letter Gandhi mentions that South Africa provides "a very fine opportunity" for one wants to practice agriculture. He laments the lack of cultivation even when the soil is fertile. This lament is visible again in another letter he wrote to the weekly after seven month (published in *The Vegetarian* on 24 March 1894) detailing his own experiments in vital food. The experiment was undertaken after Gandhi was much taken in by Mr. A. H. Hills track on the topic. In his letter, he described his food intake of twelve days and resultant effect on his body. He concluded that he failed in his experiment because he was too impatient and also the weather was not appropriate. Gandhi's description of the experiment reads almost like an entry in a laboratory journal. I argue that Gandhi decided on this kind of scientific strategy in order to prove that vegetarianism is as much an object of science as it is of ethics and morals. While confessing his failure in the experiment he hoped that other people reading his experiment will undertake it in better way by learning from his mistakes and/or experiences (*CWMG* vol. 1: 121-124). It can be surmised that Gandhi's saw a clear opportunity in his role as a missionary of vegetarianism provided he could communicate his enthusiasm to the

readers as well as to the public in South Africa. His appeal to Indian students in England to join the vegetarian society has already been discussed above.

Gandhi records another victory in his mission as he was able to convert a Christian boy to vegetarianism. What is interesting in this record is that his remark that it is easy to convince children of "the grand truth" and wean them away from meat. Although he notes the support of the parents in such cases, nevertheless childhood is located as the fulcrum where good habits are be inculcated easily (*CWMG* vol. 1: 126-127). Gandhi puts up advertisement for the sale of books which influenced him in England, those dealing with vegetarianism and theosophists. In a letter to *The Natal Mercury*, he proposed these books to be useful to those readers who have:

> found the present-day materialism and all its splendour to be insufficient for the needs of his soul, if he has a craving for a better life, and if, under the dazzling and bright surface of modern civilization, he finds that there is much that is contrary to what one would expect under such a surface, and above all, if the modern luxuries and the ceaseless feverish activity afford no relief… (*CWMG* vol. 1: 169)

The above quotation can be easily read as an anticipation of the arguments Gandhi makes fifteen years later in *Hind Swaraj*. This will show that *Hind Swaraj* did not come into existence in a frenzied state of mind in which Gandhi wrote it. Rather, the arguments were developing right from the early days of Gandhi in England. The influence of vegetarian and theosophists can be seen in *Hind Swaraj*. The abiding friendship with the 'Other' West allowed Gandhi to frame his arguments as an overarching critique of modern Western civilization.

It was in a letter addressed to *The* Vegetarian in May 1895 (published on 18 May 1895) that Gandhi points to the vegetarianism as a site of conflict between the white population and Indian population. He mentions that although the soil was fertile the whites did not cultivate land and it were only Indian farmers who have reaped the benefit

of the soil. Moreover, the flesh-eating white population have remained a hindrance to the progress of the community. Thus there was a difference in the status of the two communities. Agricultural farms in South Africa were owned by the Indians because they were vegetarians and were hard workers. (*CWMG* vol. 1: 223). This political economy of vegetarianism threatened the position of Indians as Britishers start looking them as competitors. For Gandhi, it was a cause of great distress as he believed that the "two communities … ought to be united and work hand in hand" (*CWMG* vol. 1: 223).

Commenting on the great nineteenth century gold rush in South Africa, Gandhi laments that "The gold fever is so infectious in these regions that it has smitten the highest and the lowest, the spiritual leaders included. They find no time for higher pursuits of life" (*CWMG* vol. 1: 291). The mad pursuit of gold is almost satanic for it does not allow people to lead the most natural way of life, that is, agriculture. Without agriculture, Gandhi's missionary zeal for vegetarianism was to proceed very slowly. The only radical way forward is to hope for the dissolution of the colour prejudice on the part of the British colonial officers which kept them from employing Indian hands on their farms. This is a complex problem and in such a situation vegetarians "have a scope for patriotic work" (*CWMG* vol. 1: 291-2). Once again, vegetarianism is a site which offers a wonderful scope of union between British and Indians:

> The line of marriage between white British subjects and Indians is getting thicker day by day in South Africa. The best English and Indian statesmen are of opinion that Britain and India can be indissolubly united by the chain of love. The spiritualists anticipate good results from such a union. The South African white British subjects are doing their utmost to retard, and, if possible, to prevent such a union. *It may be that some vegetarians may come forward to arrest such a catastrophe*. (*CWMG* vol. 1: 291-2; emphasis added)

This letter was written to *The Vegetarian*. So it is clear that the audience were the British. Such an exertion for unity between British and Indians worked on multiple levels. At one

level, Gandhi forced the British public to realize that the representatives of the British empire indulged in grossest of discriminations in the colony and thwarted any possibility of friendship between two cultures. On the other level, Gandhi showed vegetarianism could be used as a site where two cultures could come together and mingle with each other freely. The sense of urgency in this project was palpable for sense of imminent catastrophe. By exposing the double-standard of the white British subjects in South Africa, Gandhi sought to recruit the sympathetic and humane sections of the British society in his struggle against the ill-treatment of Indians in South Africa. The goal was as much political as it was ethical and culinary.

I argue that Gandhi turned vegetarian diet, like other mundane things such as salt, clothing, fasting etc., into a public spectacle later on in India while waging fight for independence from the foreign yoke. Vegetarianism was hoisted from simple ethical dilemma and refashioned into a political tool. This tool was also utilized in Gandhian critique of modern civilization from the perspective of health.

It was in South Africa that Gandhi configured a spiritual-moral avatar for vegetarianism which found its most powerful public utterance in 1931 where he delivers a lecture "The Moral Basis of Vegetarianism" on the invitation of Vegetarian Society in London. But the contour of the new trajectory of vegetarianism was thought upon in South Africa itself. In order for a truly global career, vegetarianism itself has to be transformed into a religious principle from a mere hygienic concept, that is to say, "The platform will have to shifted much higher" (*CWMG* vol. 1: 292).

In Sheikh Mehtab episode of his biography, Gandhi cites socio-cultural and religious background as a reason for his vegetarianism. Later on, after the encounter with the Vegetarian Society of England, it became a firm conviction transcending the Hindu (Vaishnavaa)-Jain taboo on meat. But it will be simplistic of read his missionary zeal on

vegetarianism only as a result of these two matrices. Roy (2010) argues that we need to see Gandhi's vegetarianism as a critical response to the project of modernity itself. In terms of dietary logic of modernity as well as colonialism, meat eating was the point of entry. Probably the most famous Indian exponent of this dietary logic was Vivekananda who saw salvation in the triumvirate of 'beef, bicep and *Bhagvadgita*'. A close look at Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* gives us a clue to understand how he uses vegetarianism as a counter to modernity. His critique of modern medical science and its procedures is directly linked to the anti-vivisection and animal welfare lobby of Vegetarian Society of England. Employing the logic of spiritual element of humanity which accords it a place higher than the animal world, Gandhi goes on to claim that modern medicine's chief fault lies in that it cannot cure moral and spiritual causes of disease. Its excessive care for the body entails it to sacrifice thousands of animals and at the same time it had made man excessively indulgent (M. K. Gandhi 2003: 51). It should be pointed out that the link between vegetarianism and anti-vivisection appeared in Gandhi's early life, more precisely when Mavji Joshi was persuading Gandhi's family that he should be sent to England for further studies. Gandhi's instinctive choice of study was medicine (M. K. Gandhi 2011: 34) but his brother put an end to his enthusiasm for medical profession saying that, "Father never liked it. He had you [Gandhi] in mind when he said that we Vaishnavas should have nothing to do with dissection of dead bodies" (M. K. Gandhi 2011: 34). The Vaishnava background provided cultural resources for both vegetarianism as well as anti-vivisection which Gandhi came to endorse later on in life.

This angle of counter-modernity takes the form of vegetarian national self and posits it right into the frame of anti-colonial struggle. Such a trope held an enormous power as it sent the message to the large sections of Indian populace that one can be the part of freedom struggle even by practising vegetarianism and abjuring unnecessary

killing of animals. At the same time it also sends a powerful message that vegetarianism is a form of non-violence. Stuart points to the trajectory of Gandhi's vegetarianism from its medical and economic sphere to religious and moral spheres. Vegetarianism came to be directly linked to Ahimsa (non-violence) which for Gandhi was central to both Hinduism and Christianity (Stuart 2008: 426). He further argues that, "Gandhi tried to shift the Western vegetarian tradition towards the core Indian doctrine of *ahimsa*. But he also introduced Western arguments into the traditional debate about *ahimsa in* India" (Stuart 2008: 426).

Although nowhere Gandhi has mentioned that one can take part in Indian freedom movement by merely practising vegetarianism, I argue that people did take seriously this vegetarian aspect of Gandhi and believed that as with following other activities of Gandhi, one can become a participant in the freedom movement. It is a common knowledge Gandhi linked activities such as spinning, weaving, boycott of foreign goods and institutions, working for the uplift of Untouchables with the participation in the freedom movement. Many of his followers extended this linkage to include vegetarianism. As Subaltern Studies Collective have demonstrated, during the freedom movement, leadership at local level appropriated the command of the central leadership to suit it to local requirements or conditions. The use of vegetarianism has to be understood through this appropriation. In his article "Waiting for the Mahatma," Shahid Amin traces the influence of Gandhi's speech in Gorakhpur district of erstwhile United Provinces on 8 February 1920. Gandhi, in his speech, focussed on usual themes of Hindu-Muslim unity; boycott of government schools, college, offices; not to use violence (*lathi*), not to spread rumour and not to enforce social boycott on their own; to stop gambling, ganja smoking, drinking and whoring; spinning and weaving; and how Swaraj will be brought forth (Amin 2010: 73). Amin then documents how Gandhi's speech was dissected and

classified into different parts for understanding of the local population. Moreover, the power of Gandhi as 'Mahatma' led rise to various rumours. The subject matter of most of the rumours was common: someone did not believe in the power of Mahatma Gandhi and acted contrary to his teaching and as a result that person had to face terrible consequences in term of loss of life or property. Among various rumours Amin records, one is of particular interest for the sake my argument. Amin writes that one of the rumours was:

> The sons of a Tamoli near Bhatni Station killed a goat and ate it up. Some people tried to dissuade them, but they paid no heed. Later, all of them started vomiting and got very worried. In the end, when they vowed in the name of Mahatmaji never to eat meat again, their condition improved. (Amin 2010: 75)

As can be seen in this rumour that vegetarianism came occupy a very important role for those who wished to follow 'Mahatma' in the freedom movement. Although Gandhi did not say anything regarding meat-eating, his injunction against the use of intoxicants was conveniently extended to the meat-eating as it occupied the same space in purity-pollution index of the local custom. This rumour dovetailed nicely into the constructed image of 'Mahatma' not only as a political leader but also as a religious leader and thus it also became, as Amin mentions, an indicator of religiosity and lower-caste self-assertion at the same time (Amin 2010: 76).

My point was to show how vegetarianism operated during the freedom movement at the level of masses who construed their own meaning in the persona, speech and actions of Gandhi. The vegetarian 'self' was Gandhi struck a chord with millions of Indians who found both a political and religious reason for believing that vegetarianism means fight the British. This was the 'national subjectivity' which they chose and fashioned after Gandhi.

In the following section, I look at the trajectory of Gandhi's vegetarianism after his South African phase to see how it shifts from political to moral space.

4.8 Political to Moral: Changing Basis of Vegetarianism

By 1931, Gandhi came to be regarded as the leading figure of Indian freedom struggle. Till then he had spent some thirty eight years of active political career. This career was marked by all kinds of experiments in all kinds of areas of life ranging from diet, clothing, truth, non-violence, *Brahmacharya*, community living, education, and social service. 1931 was an important year in the Gandhian career of vegetarianism, more specifically, the date 20 November 1931. In the winter of 1931 Gandhi was in London to participate in Round Table Conference organized by the British government. Over there he was invited by the London Vegetarian Society to deliver a talk which he accepted gladly. It was a special occasion for Gandhi too. When forty years ago, he delivered his talk at the Society, he was still a very shy young man who was not able to speak for more than a few minutes. After forty years, the young man returned as an old man of 62 years and with fame which spread over the entire world. He had metamorphosed into a leader who spoke even with his silences and everybody sat up to listen and ponder over. Here, the added attraction for Gandhi was the presence of Henry Salt, the same person whose book *A Plea for Vegetarianism* launched Gandhi in the political career. In the speech delivered here, titled as "The Moral Basis of Vegetarianism," Gandhi traced the journey and development of his idea of vegetarianism. Gandhi used the platform to make a critique of merely medical values of vegetarianism. According to him, the medical reason was not enough to sustain vegetarianism. He made a sarcastic remark that earlier vegetarians were so obsessed with food and disease that they did not care for any other topic. Then he went on to say that, "I discovered that for remaining staunch to vegetarianism a man requires a moral basis" (M. K. Gandhi 2010c: 26). Further he remarks:

> For me that was a great discovery in my search after truth. At an early age, in the course of my experiments, I found that a selfish basis would not serve the purpose of taking a man higher and

> higher along the paths of evolution. What was required was an altruistic purpose. I found also that health was by no means the monopoly of vegetarians. (M. K. Gandhi 2010c: 26)

Here the altruistic purpose in Gandhi's case is obviously his political action for liberating the country. Clearly, he is disapproving of those who made vegetarianism a fad just for the sake of it. This observation of Gandhi is not a new one but it what he developed in the course of his political struggle and experiments in diet. As discussed above, Gandhi's vegetarianism did win him many acolytes and followers who followed his every command, not necessarily with full understanding of its implications. It is keeping in mind such people that Gandhi remarked in 1921:

> Abstemiousness from intoxicating drinks and drugs, and from all kinds of foods, especially meat, is undoubtedly a great aid to the evolution of the spirit, but it is by no means an end in itself. Many a man eating meat and with everybody but living in the fear of God is nearer his freedom than a man religiously abstaining from meat and many other things, but blaspheming God in every one of his acts. (M. K. Gandhi 1921: 6)

Clearly, Gandhi is wary of trivialising the powerful site of vegetarianism. He sought to harness the powerful potential of vegetarianism for realizing the truth and *ahimsa*. But he was not ready to acknowledge the selfish motives of vegetarians which may not have any to do with truth. His earlier understanding of meat-eating man as inferior to vegetarian man underwent a sea-change. Gandhi wishes to use the spiritualising potential of vegetarianism towards service of self-less service of humanity.

Again in 1928, Gandhi issues the same warning against superficiality of vegetarians. He discounts the claims of such persons as the practitioners of *ahimsa*. For Gandhi, a man "always overscrupulous in diet is an utter stranger to Ahimsa and a pitiful wretch, if he is a slave to selfishness and passions and is hard of heart" (M. K. Gandhi 1928: 5). *Ahmisa* transcends mere matter of dietetics. Diet does form a part of it but it can never be a substitute for *ahmisa* (M. K. Gandhi 1928: 4).

These understandings which Gandhi developed in his life and work found its logical culmination at the 1931 meeting of London Vegetarian Society. He uses his critique of Western medicine in *Hind Swaraj* here too saying that a vegetarian should prefer death over prescription of medicines which had animal fat in it. He uses his favourite binary of body and spirit to say that vegetarianism is the building of the spirit and not of the body. It is easy to see the distance Gandhi had travelled from 1891 when he posed vegetarian Indian shepherd as the fitting counter to the British masculinity. The body has yielded its privileged position to the spirit. As far as the body is concerned, it is the mix of many other things along with personal scruple which is responsible for its being fit or not (M. K. Gandhi 2010c: 27). The moral journey of vegetarianism rapidly shifted to a spiritual domain and Gandhi used it as a tool for 'spiritualisation of politics'.

4.9 Vegetarianism and the Spiritualisation of Politics

What in London was a question of diet and hygiene transformed into 'religious' and 'moral' questions in South Africa. In the early years of the twentieth century Gandhi was at the forefront of the struggle of South African Indians and had launched *Satyagraha*. This was not merely a political battle. Gandhi changed the framework of the struggle itself. His changes in personal life style, adoption of community life, vow of *Brahmacharya* and beginning of Satyagraha brought 'spiritual' elements into what was in the beginning only a political question. He made truth and non-violence the ingredients of *Satyagraha*. After this formulation, all other acts of Gandhi fell into this truth and non-violence matrix. His vow of *Brahmacharya* was a step in that direction of Satyagraha. From the very beginning Gandhi equated food with passion. He believed very firmly that particular kinds of foods are responsible for the arousal of sexual passion in the body so one need to keep away from that. This belief, it can be argued, is again something where

both his own cultural milieu influenced by Jainism and those of the explanations of members of vegetarian society in London came together. Salt, in his *A Plea for Vegetarianism,* mentions that flesh-eating directly feeds into the acts of "vices and violence" (Salt 1886: 17). n South Africa, Gandhi's food acquired a new 'religious' connotation apart from its earlier political connotation (M. K. Gandhi 2011: 294).

The first step in the spiritualization of politics vis-à-vis vegetarianism was to pose the the concept of vegetarianism as the spiritual principle itself. So from being a mere physical and hygienic act, it was projected as a vehicle for spiritual regeneration. In a letter written to *The Natal Mercury* newspaper on 4 February 1896, Gandhi uses all kinds of arguments to show the superiority of the vegetarian diet[9] but his most important argument was the religious-spiritual argument:

> The spiritualists hold, and the practice of the religious teachers of all the religions, except, perhaps, the generality of Protestant teachers shows, that nothing is more detrimental to the spiritual faculty of man than the gross feeding on flesh. (*CWMG* vol. 1: 293)

Also,

> They [vegetarian moralists] also argue that since meat-eating is not only unnecessary but harmful to the system, indulgence in it is immoral and sinful, because it involves the inflicting of unnecessary pain on and cruelty towards harmless animals. (*CWMG* vol. 1: 294)

Non-vegetarianism is irreligious as it entails killing living beings which is sinful. Vegetarianism is now no longer confined to some humanistic concerns but it becomes a universal spiritual principle and anything which goes against the grain of spiritualism cuts at the ethical fiber of the world we live in.

[9] Apart from religious-spiritual argument, Gandhi also poses vegetarianism as the most economical diet and that "peasantry of the world are practically vegetarian" (CWMG Vol 1: 294). Gandhi argues that it is only vegetarianism which could lessen the great divide between the rich people of the world and paupers of the world.

The biggest shift in Gandhian career of vegetarianism came in during the Zulu rebellion where Gandhi deliberated on the concept of *Brahmacharya*.[10] It became important for Gandhi because politics, in Gandhian vision of the world, was nothing but serving the humanity at large. During Zulu revolt, Gandhi reflected that a person given to the pleasure of senses could not serve the humanity:

> In a word, I could not live both after the flesh and the spirit. On the present occasion [of Ambulance Corps during Zulu revolt], for instance, I should not have been able to throw myself into the fray, had my wife been expecting a baby. Without the observance of *brahmacharya* service of the family would be inconsistent with service of the community. With *brahmacharya* they would be perfectly consistent. (M. K. Gandhi 2011: 290-1)

A person could either look after the household like a regular house-holder or work for the society. A regular house-holder cannot do both the works together. Here *Brahmacharya* has been invoked by Gandhi not simply for smooth traffic from private world to the public world and vice-versa. *Brahmacharya* has been brought in to demolish the thick wall between the private and the public world. For a *Brahmachari* there is no difference between his own family and the world at large. One is not more important than the other. Both operate at the same level, that is, a *Brahmachari* does not believe in any distinction between one person and the other. As soon as Gandhi decided to lead the life of *Brahmacharya* he became "impatient to take the final vow. The prospect of vow brought a certain kind of exultation" (M. K. Gandhi 2011: 291). Gandhi wishes to take the "vow". No other word or vocabulary will do. The "vow" is a rich trope which runs through Gandhi's life. In his childhood, he took vows of truth and filial devotion. His mother administered a vow of abstaining from meat, wine and women before he went to London. Now he wishes to take another 'vow' that of *Brahmacharya*. This will be the supreme

[10] A very rough English translation of *Brahmacharya* could be 'celibacy' but 'celibacy does not convey the rich texture of meanings associated with *Brahmacharya*. It is not only sexual abstinence but also self-restraint from all kinds of passions. It entails controlling all senses. *Brahmacharya* is subserving all the senses as well as mind so as achieve perfect self-realization.

vow of his life and the very thought of taking the 'vow' brings excitement in him. The importance of 'vow' was not only for collapsing the boundary between service to the family and service to the humanity but, just like vegetarianism, it became to the very basis of Gandhi's definition of being human. He writes:

> Life without *brahmacharya* appears to me to be insipid and animal-like. The brute by nature knows no self-restraint. Man is man because he is capable of, and only in so far as he exercises, self-restraint. What formerly appeared to me to be extravagant praise of *brahmacharya* in our religious books seems now, with increasing clearness every day, to be absolutely proper and founded on experience. (M. K. Gandhi 2011: 291)

It is hard to miss the fact that almost everything in the above quotation equally applies to Gandhi's explication of vegetarianism. Very soon Gandhi would realize that vegetarianism dovetails perfectly into his scheme of *Brahmacharya*. Here, it is self-restraint which becomes the central aim. It is self-restraint which constitutes the "manliness" of "man" for Gandhi. Those devoid of self-restraint are not better than animals. This argument can be taken further to emphasize that in Gandhian scheme of things a true man who one who exercise self-restraint and in turns practices *Brahmacharya*. The traditional Hindu concept of *Brahmachari* as the epitome of humanity comes into the play. Indeed, Gandhi says clearly that what he had read in his books in childhood has turned out to be totally. This is in continuation with truthfulness of other traditional things which Gandhi inherited in his childhood. Every time, he was given certain things in his childhood, Gandhi thought them to be foolish but later on in life, he acknowledges the truthfulness of all those things. His maid servant Rambha taught him Ramanama in his childhood as an antidote to his fear of darkness. In the later life, Ramanama became an integral part of Gandhi's life so much so that it is alleged that at the time of his assassination, Ramanama was the last word on his lips. When his mother administered him a vow before he went to England, Gandhi took it just for the

sake of clearing all objections to his passage to England. But the vow administered by the mother turned out to be totally in consonance with the scientific truth as he discovered reading Salt's *Plea to Vegetarianism*. And now with *Brahmacharya* its one's again the tradition which showed the true way. These incidents definitely give us a clue as to how Gandhi could have launched a scathing critique of western modernity in *Hind Swaraj*. It can be claimed that it was incidents such as those discussed above which convinced Gandhi that Indian traditional wisdom is the repository of "truth" and Indians do not need to be swayed by the British education system which was the result of its satanic civilization.

After taking the vow of *Brahmacharya* Gandhi went to to perform a series of experiments to test his vow. Food was obviously the first physical thing which caught his imagination. Drawing on his readings of different books and his interactions with Raychandbhai—the late nineteenth century Jain mystic of Gujarat—Gandhi decided that food is directly linked to passion. So he went to reform his vegetarian diet in all possible ways. He tried different combinations of food items, kept on reducing the number of food items as well as quantity of food to achieve the perfect balance. In the process, the career of vegetarianism achieved another height. By linking *Brahmacharya* as the only way in which one could serve both one's own family as well as the community or nation, Gandhi offered his followers a new praxis of serving the community. One could have the vow of *Brahmacharya* to become fit for the service of the nation and as *Brahmacharya* was intricately linked to vegetarianism, it offered a powerful symbol for the public at large to be associated with the freedom struggle of the community in South Africa and that of the country in India.

In this chapter, I have tried to argue that Gandhi's travel to England as a student resulted into his realization of 'vegetarianism' as an important took in the fashioning of

the ‘self’. Vegetarianism gave him a sense of ‘self’ in an alien land. This, coupled with his contact with London Vegetarian Society, allowed him to constitute a ‘national subjectivity’ which allowed Gandhi to launch a powerful critique of colonial logic of British rule in India. Vegetarianism, I have argued, recurs in Gandhi’s life and work as a trope and it impinges upon his political world. As such, food was/is a matter which is considered to be the site of culture but in Gandhi there was no difference between personal, social, economic, cultural and political world. All merged seamlessly in his personality. So, it was inevitable that the vegetarian food was to inform his life and politics in ways beyond his own control. I have tried to trace the trajectory of this trope of ‘vegetarianism’ in Gandhi’s life beginning from its identification with effeminacy and then developing into the site of national masculine ideal to a political, moral and finally a spiritual principle which represented the unique identity of India and Indianness.