

QUEST AS GANDHI'S BEQUEST TO GANDHIANS

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Introduction by Editor

"Constructive work played an important role in Gandhian (and even pre-Gandhian) strategy. It was primarily organised around the promotion of khadi, spinning and village industries, national education and, Hindu Muslim unity, the struggle against untouchability and the social upliftment of the Harijans, and the boycott of foreign cloth and liquor. Constructive work was symbolised by hundreds of Ashrams which came up all over the country, almost in the entire villages. ...It solved a basic problem that a mass movement faces – the sustenance of a sense of activism in the non-mass movement phases of the struggle.the hardcore of constructive workers also provided a large cadre for the Civil Disobedience Movement. They were Gandhiji's steel-frame or standing army¹."

One of the several traits of Gandhi that have come to be studied since his time is his role as an Institution builder. He was a meticulous institution builder and often gave instructions to great lengths to his followers on the ways in which institutions ought to be managed. His insistence on meticulous detailing of keeping accounts, making facilities available for all, ensuring that the discipline and punctuality are maintained, etc., have been recorded and replicated across several institutions in India and abroad. In fact, there is an entire genre of books that seem to be dedicated

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these days to studying the ways in which he managed institutions and initiatives and advised others. Several books have highlighted his methods as 'strategic' and 'tactical' ways in which he dealt with both friends and foes. While these may be considered interesting or reductive based on where one views them from, it cannot be denied that a large scale organisation of masses like what he did in India with such heterogeneous people, and to carry them along with his ideals, required him to be extremely well organised in his personal discipline and also very well organised with people and materials around him.

Ram Thapar in his book, "Gandhian Management – The Paragon of Higher Order Management", highlights the various leadership aspects of the Mahatma that have gained relevance and been noticed subsequently. Quotes the press attaché of the last viceroy Lord Mountbatten thus, "The whole of Gandhi's life is a fascination study in the art of influencing the masses, and by judging the success he achieved in this mysterious domain, he must be accounted as one of the greatest artists in leadership of all time. He has a genius for acting through symbols which all can understand".

He often tried to ensure that institutions have their mandates written differently and placed on themselves restrictions as a matter of policy to ensure that the intent of the institution is manifested through such an imposition. For instance, the members of the Congress itself were modified in 1934 to reflect the needs of the governance in which many Congressmen were getting involved at that time. "The setting up of the All India Village Industries Association (AIVIA) and the 1934 amendments to the constitution of the Congress – which made it a rule that henceforth only 25 per cent of the membership of the All India Congress Committee would come from the urban areas and not less than 75 per cent from the rural areas – became a cause of great concern to the British authorities in India³." write Dharampal in his insightful collection of articles on "Understanding Gandhi".

In the following article that sweeps across many decades, one of the doyens and institutional builders himself, Shri M.V. Sastry along with Prof. Shambu Prasad, writes takes the instances of another Gandhian constructive worker, Sri. Krishnamurthy and in chronicling the work of institution-building by him, also indicates to us how such institutions got constituted, their challenges, function and relevance today.

Gandhi's work and life has been interpreted and invoked by local, national and international leaders over the years. His message and worldview of a society or world order based on peace and non-violence has inspired many movements and leaders outside India like Nelson Mandela in his and the African Congress' fight against apartheid or Martin Luther King's fight against racism. Within India, Gandhi has inspired several non-violent land and environmental movements like the Bhoodan, Chipko, Appiko and the anti-Narmada struggles. While Gandhian literature abounds with insights on his political philosophy, his vision for a true, as opposed to parliamentary, Swaraj or self-rule and his latter vision of a society organised not as a pyramid but as an oceanic circle has received insufficient attention. Gandhi's views and early insights on "Hind Swaraj" (1909) needs to be fused and reinterpreted with his later insights on "Oceanic Circles" (1946) where independence would begin at the bottom⁴. Gandhi believed that "true democracy cannot be worked by twenty men sitting at the Centre. It has to be worked from below by the people of every village."

This paper explores some of the institutions that believed in strengthening grassroots democracy that during Gandhi's times often emerged in his discussions with co-workers and his constructive work agenda⁷. In this paper, we try to broaden Gandhi's thoughts on constructive work by linking it up with ongoing discussions on civil society as an autonomous space beyond the State and the market in India. We make the case for a closer examination of both experiments and institutional structures that have reinterpreted Gandhi's constructive work in post-independent India. We highlight this through the example of one such Gandhian, V Krishna Murty

or VK, and an institution that he shaped, the Centre for World Solidarity (CWS). In tracing and recounting the journey of CWS, its precursor ASW, and its offshoots or spin-offs in the last 15-20 years, we see some possibilities for a resurgent civil society in contemporary India.

Introduction

When Gandhi was made to leave abruptly on the morrow of Indian Independence in 1948, Gandhians were left with an enormous void, which could be only filled with several questions they had to answer themselves, for themselves and to the nation at large. One such Gandhian was V. Krishna Murty from Madurai in deep South who formulated these questions and attempted his own answers. This essay actually began as an offering to the memory of V. Krishna Murty (also VK hereinafter) on his birth centenary in March 2017. VK was an important part of the civil society work in India. Following India's independence, VK contributed to the refugee rehabilitation work in North India. He returned, via Sevagram, to Gandhian constructive work in Tamil Nadu. The Gandhigram Trust and Gandhigram University are his most visible collaborative contributions. While that was so, there was another side to his work, to which he gave more than a decade of his life, which, in the nature of things, was not always as visible. That was the motivation he gave to several to do ground-level development work in their own areas. In this work though he was inspired by core Gandhian constructive work, he went beyond that and helped in bringing in more development ideas in what he initiated. In that sense, in his later work he was a post-Gandhi Gandhian: he used to think aloud, during his last years, how he was perhaps too stuck in the

Gandhian orthodoxy in his beginnings --- which is in a way a critique of the post -Gandhi Gandhian work as much as a self-critique. But VK never allowed his Gandhian beginnings, in which he was deeply steeped, to come in the way of his later work; more importantly, he gave handsome encouragement to his new and younger colleagues to go beyond the orthodox Gandhian template. This is something not many Gandhians did, with the result that Gandhian work needed a special moment, and a big push, like the Bhoodan movement, to gain even some constricted relevance in post-1947 India. The tendency of Gandhians despite the Bhoodan movement was again to go back to their shell rather than whole-heartedly attempting constructive work vertically over the gains of Bhoodan.

The later construct as orthodoxy by Gandhians restricts Gandhianism to essentially local work through "inwardism" and did not contemplate bonding with initiatives globally for mutual reinforcement. The orthodoxy construct did not provide for what Gandhi himself articulated so well to keep our windows open for ideas from all over, without allowing ourselves being blown off our feet. Even if freedom was the immediate mission, Gandhi always had an inseparable long-term vision for India, and his followers did not always take to these nuances that included among others the disbanding of the Congress, working towards the vision of 'oceanic circles' or in his advice to Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and the Indian Cooperative Union to 'keep away from the Government'. VK was among those who realised the importance of taking that Gandhian message forward in a full measure for which he gave a framework to several through the Gandhigram Trust --- and the Action for World Solidarity---, both at tandem and under his active promotion.

Gandhian Constructive Work in Juxtaposition to Working for Political Freedom

In the 1930s, clear lines were drawn by Gandhi between constructive work and political struggle, even as for the Mahatma, the two telescoped into each other. The lines of separation were more on who did what as specialisation and the lines got particular emphasis following the Poona Pact between Gandhi and Ambedkar. Constructive work propounded by Gandhi consisted, among others, of khadi work, eradication of untouchability, and opening up temples to Harijans. Despite the importance of Gandhi's thinking on constructive work, opinion on it was divided. Nehru was puzzled by the epic fast of Gandhi itself on the question of separate electorates to Dalits awarded by the British; to Nehru this was a "side" issue. We feel, in retrospect, the constructive programme, an essential part of the Gandhian vision, was not discussed enough in the public discourses of the period by the broad political front, consisting of even Leftists, as sending out the alien rulers was the priority at least in point of timing. The political class generally did not go deep enough into the constructive programmes and many tended to smile at it and accept it as a Gandhian fad because there was agreement that Gandhi anyhow was needed at the forefront to eject the British. While constructive programmes and the political struggle were two sides of the same coin for Gandhi (the former was perhaps closer to his heart), the political attracted the flamboyant among his followers; the less dramatic became dear to the socially oriented, those who were moved by the plight of the poor, the Dalits and the women. The less dramatic also became the glue to those who were not ready to face the rigours and consequences of political action, but liked to be on board somehow.

The injunction to the constructive workers to stick to the economic and social agenda, and not be swerved into the political arena, gave philosophical underpinning to the option of constructive work by those who were unready for the political due to diverse reasons. All this worked well before the British left. But since the plumes went to the political workers following Independence, the constructive workers started demurring, resulting in several of them not excusing themselves for their past option, seen in retrospect as somewhat soft by themselves and others. There was also no more the kind of excitement in constructive work in independent India that existed in the '30s and early '40s because the State seemed to be ready to embrace all that. Importantly there was no Gandhi to lead and drive the constructive workers even if they were willing to stick to it. As pointer of all this can be noted the tapering off of the work of the Gandhian Ashrams, in working in which the Gandhians took enormous pride during the '30s and early '40s. These were the persons and groups that eventually became, after a lag, a section of the prime movers of what later got to be called the civil society of India. This section, after Independence, started doing what they felt should have been done by them earlier, viz., political action, of being critical of the government. When a part of civil society chose to have habitual face-off with the State in independent India, this was to the detriment to the ground-level development work which, in our view, is basic to the civil society.

Towards Genuine World Solidarity

The above gives the context in which to view VK's contribution to constructive work in independent India and his involvement in the German Action for World Solidarity⁶. The narrative

is of the story of additions to the Gandhian work triggered by VK and by a worthwhile effort in a world which became more and more integrated on top and started moving on juggernaut-like wheels, even if on a path bumpy, swamping all ground-level impulses. In such a changing world, VK established linkages through Action for World Solidarity, between essentially Indian work on Gandhian lines, and thinking and work abroad that could be complementary to envision integration commencing from below. VK thus gave concrete shape to the idea of moving beyond the orthodoxy construct, referred to earlier.

This small effort was directed towards contributing tangibly to eventual world solidarity (as is proclaimed both by Action for World Solidarity⁸ and its successor in India the Centre for World Solidarity). Such solidarity was to be postulated in a world which was apparently together, important fissures papered well, in the post Second World War immediate years. The global facade of togetherness on one side and the so-called Iron Curtain on the other, illustrate a basic division. The efforts towards laying the foundation to the eventual, genuine, world solidarity was quite challenging in that context, and it had to be begun, according to Action for World Solidarity, by identifying and gathering bricks here and abroad, so that they could be eventually cemented together --- a long process indeed, that nonetheless had had to have a beginning somewhere.

There is some significance at the beginning of the effort of ASW from Germany, left in ruins by the Second World War. It was given to some socially conscious Germans to assess that Germans owed something special to the world which was

devastated, essentially because their country misguided itself to think it was apart from other nations: contribution towards world solidarity could be possible only if this wrong perception was countered; concrete action was needed from ordinary Germans, to atone for what was wrought, with the atonement blended with a conviction that a just world order could only emerge when a sense of equality could prevail among nations. Could the concrete action be in the form of alleviation of hunger in the developing world? Simplistic, but the simpler the better for a starter, it appeared, especially as the initiative emanated from the ordinary Germans.

Daring to Attempt the New

That is how Action for World Solidarity (ASW) was founded by some individual Germans about a decade after the 1945 cessation of hostilities, in 1958 to be precise. The sponsors of this body could count among its supporters the redoubtable Willy Brandt, the future Mayor of West Berlin and Chancellor of Federal Germany. The impeccability of the initiators and supporters gave a boost to the initiative. We must clarify that the measure of the boost could not be in terms of the scale of work, or the momentum the work picked, but in the Gandhian flavour of what was initiated. If we imagine the world, and Germany, of that time, the boost could simply mean that the effort was of a quality, which could not be pooh-poohed. As a matter of record, the beginning evoked the spontaneous support of several ordinary Germans reflecting the yearning of theirs that could be read in what ASW stood for. Thousands of Germans donated their Marks to ASW's international work, and it is this public support which gave a niche to ASW among the bodies which were involved in international development work.

A few other characteristics of ASW may be noticed. Given the public responses of a gratifying nature, ASW decided that its main source for support should remain the small person's Marks. Second, the group of persons who would run and administer the international programmes of ASW should function in the most democratic manner, signalling a marked, if small, break from the immediate past of Germany. This can be seen as appropriate if one remembers the tragic consequences of democratic Weimar republic never getting a real chance in post-first world war Germany. A telling indicator of the commitment to a fully democratic process opted for by ASW was that there would not be a hierarchy in the group running ASW. Everything was open for discussion and decision-making, often inviting derision from others that ASW carried democracy too far! But this was the practice that gave enduring respect to ASW, and attracted, and retained, the right kind of functionaries to it, with firm determination to avoid the routine, and the convenient, in their work.

There was a third characteristic of ASW equally important: it wished to view the persons abroad who helped in administering the programmes as co-equals, not as recipients. The lofty impulses of Action for World Solidarity were in line with what pervaded the world at least superficially, following the Second World War. The most hoary articulation of humanity's aspirations for the future contained in the United Nations Charter's Preamble which commenced thus: "We the peoples of the United Nations determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war" and towards that end "to employ international machinery for promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples"; etc.

In a humble way, ASW could claim to have started its work to contribute, from below, towards the ends figuring in the Charter of U.N, though ASW was too minor a player to evoke the U.N. Charter as such in the context of its work. ASW's work was significant not because of its scale (we repeat), but because of how and from where it commenced. Its treating those who may receive its help as equals and recognising them as capable of decision-making, marked the unique nature of ASW's work, which was visualised as a people-to-people initiative. This was a pioneering thought process in that era, with, today, several others following that path.

In this people-to-people initiative, Action for World Solidarity was keen to be guided by the knowledgeable among those at the receiving end and it was because of this keenness that, for India work, it gave the responsibility to an experienced Indian consultant. ASW thought (as noticed already) that contributing towards hunger alleviation was its immediate calling. Once the priority was decided, it followed that India would figure as its main work area, given that the origins of the Bengal famine during the war years were slowly getting unearthed. Given also ASW's smallness, it chose to feed as many hungry children of India as possible. The task of the Indian consultant was to advise ASW on how this should be done.

ASW was lucky that it had in VK a most appropriate person as the guide in its work. This well-known Gandhian, who was earlier involved in the refugee rehabilitation work in Faridabad in North India after the partition of India in 1947, was subsequently drafted to promote the Gandhigram Trust near Madurai in Tamil Nadu. The Trust aimed at advancing village development through the

Gandhian methods and ideology, and it also became subsequently the fulcrum to a university, teaching and awarding formal academic degrees to its students, training them with a Gandhian ideological flavour.

It was no easy matter for ASW to win the busy VK for the position of its Consultant in India. What attracted him to ASW were its principles --- its drawing support from the ordinary German public, a non-hierarchical structure for its work and the equality it was willing to extend to its India Consultant, respect that he needed to set-up work in India. Of course, the respect given to the Consultant was also ASW's respect for India's deprived communities. The Gandhian VK found an echo in him to the precepts of ASW, which had a family resemblance to Gandhian principles, and he saw in ASW an opening to moving away from Gandhian orthodoxy.

In the above background, VK started his work with already existing hostels to which the deprived communities were asked to send a selected number of their children. ASW's role was to give general support to the hostels and special care to ASW-nominated children so that they were freed from hunger. This work was spread over several States of India and covered a number of hostels. At the end of a decade of his work, ASW made its presence felt as an organisation that was different in terms of the design of its work.

The work of the hostels for children threw up insights both of the problems of the children, and of those of the communities from which they hailed. The insights were in the form of VK's reports that constituted the basis for the staff of ASW, Berlin, to do educational work in West Germany on what

India was really, at grassroots; this led to a greater appreciation in Federal Germany of ASW's work, and expansion of ASW membership and also resource base. Thus, the German public became not merely contributors of resources for ASW's work in India but knowledgeable contributors, thanks to the educational programmes of ASW --- an essential first step for world solidarity. VK's post-graduate studies in educational administration at Michigan State University in the 1960s helped in his gearing himself up in his support to ASW's educational work in Germany. VK was thus open to bring in newer approaches in his support to ASW's educational work.

Expanding Operations and Changing Gears

In the late 1960s, there was churning all over in development circles about the appropriateness of taking away select children from the communities (and from their families) and giving them special treatment. Would this not amount to deprivation to the families and communities because there was real risk that children so nurtured would never go back to their families and communities? This was a serious poser to ASW work in India.

The alternative to this approach was helping the children, not from some selected families, but all children of all families via assistance to the communities of which they are part. It is the development of whole communities, and development of children via their communities, which would be an ideologically sound design, though this alternative would stretch the capacity of a small body like ASW. The insightful reports of VK led to the ineluctable conclusion that ASW should opt for the difficult, and aim at communities and their problems, challenging though it would

prove because of resource limitation. It stands to the lasting credit of VK, that this change-over in ideology was considered so paramount that ASW opted for it on his advice, no matter the difficulties in grounding it.

This change of approach was done in the most democratic manner that could be thought of. In fact, the manner the change-over was realised constitutes the finest moment in VK's work. Meetings were held of all the representatives of the hostels that were being supported by ASW, and open discussions were conducted on the desirability of changing the work ideology. While the preponderant view, at the end of discussions, was for change, after VK explained the logic in a detailed manner, not all were convinced, and some steadfastly stuck to the old ideology because, to them, the impact on children helped through ASW was more visible, immediate and satisfying at once. Again it redounds to the credit of ASW, that it accepted the advice of V. Krishna Murty that there should be a friendly parting of ways so that while ASW as an organisation would switch over to community development work, the non-coverts to the new way would be respected in their desire to continue their "hostels for children" approach, for which ASW would still lend its support as appropriate. This, ASW did by giving one-time lumpsum support to each of the hostels which would go their old way so that they would use the proffered support for starting income-generating projects --- the income was expected to support the maintenance of the hostels through time. Following this tough metamorphosis, VK decided to leave the new work to a successor because of his own health problems.

Democracy has got to be from Below

A foundational characteristic of ASW in India, which it owes to VK was what do the constituents feel and like to say about the work and its processes? ASW India Chapter always had its get-together of partners annually, a tradition which was taken over by CWS, Centre for World Solidarity ---the successor to the ASW chapter in India. If ASW, Berlin, respects the India Consultant as a co-equal, so should the India Consultant treat the ASW partners in India. The annual get-together of partners was built into the work process of India, providing the occasion for free expression of views on the work, and how its quality was and could improve further. This annual occasion was one which VK enjoined on his successor as something that should never be given up.

Democracy is a much-banded concept and value; its practice may appear logical but this always proves to be difficult in practice. Democracy is wonderful when you are sure that others are going to agree with you. Practising democracy even when you have serious doubts whether your views would prevail is the acid test. That is what VK tried in the "support to children in the hostel" ideology discussions. Democracy need not mean the majority view should prevail always in the extreme sense; where a principle is involved democracy provides for cultured parting of ways, with mutual respect. This is the value that ASW, and later CWS, tried to live up to.

VK's idea of democracy was further opened up by the ASW successor CWS by welcoming rank outsiders into its annual discussions, by not treating as a charmed circle those who work with CWS closely through a financial relationship. It

is there CWS broke new ground, not always very successfully; but what should be noted is that ASW/CWS idea of democracy that is open and open-ended, attracted big numbers from the civil society, that amounted metaphorically, according to friendly circles, to an annual Kumbh Mela --- the 12-yearly Ganges occasion that brings millions for a dip. The thirst for democracy in civil society was clear in CWS experience, but the problem was one of containing democratic forces towards positive outcomes.

Rooting Institutions: From ASW to CWS

ASW, having decided to work with communities in Tamil Nadu also experimented simultaneously working with a few communities in Bihar under the stewardship of Sri Vikas Bhai, another well-known Gandhian. This work continued after the tragic death of Vikas Bhai in a road accident. In 1987, the work was extended to the contiguous States of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa with Hyderabad as its headquarters. Environmental work was given a kick-start through a major workshop in Auroville in which all Tamil Nadu groups participated. This first step was followed by "Save Eastern Ghats" campaign that evoked handsome interest among the Andhra Pradesh groups, giving a fillip to ASW's work there.

Similar was the approach towards women's work to the ambit of ASW supported work in the four States. A quick overall review was made of the experiences since the work area expanded to include Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Bihar. Whereas earlier women had to be explicitly invited to the get-togethers, a stage had come when women participants were nearly half of the total, some of them coming all the way from distant Bihar when the get-togethers took place in Hyderabad.

It was getting clearer and clearer that women needed some special handholding and that autonomy was needed for women's work so that they could form their own strategies and move forward. Following a 10-day workshop at Bangalore in 1989, women's work was looked after by women only, which gave an enormous boost to women's work under the aegis of ASW, which was seen as a pioneer among resource agencies by stressing the need for autonomous women's work.

A major theatre festival or Rang Mela was conducted at Patna in 1988, with some 500 folk artists from 14 districts of Bihar attending. They adopted song, dance and drama to enthuse themselves into development action. This galvanised a number of Bihar groups into action beyond cultural work, and soon the theatre festival became a significant landmark to be remembered after the Bihar movement of the '70s: it became the launch for ASW's intensified Bihar work, also bringing about a balance between ASW work in the North and South.

The nagging predilection against working for an agency abroad, howsoever democratic, led to an exploration on grafting the ASW chapter firmly into the Indian soil. Civil society's potential was immense and there was no alternative to leaning on it for realising the larger goals of India --- democracy, poverty alleviation and human rights of all, particularly of the socially deprived. These set of expectations have their logic arising out of a general scepticism about the State and government structures, and the attendant calls for privatisation with its own undoubted pit-falls if pursued in an undifferentiated manner. A nation must identify and promote citizens' initiatives that are sensitive to the

needs of the marginalised; while this may not be an alternative altogether to the State or private sector, it has the potency to question both and nudge them to the right path. Such an approach is superior in terms of what it can contribute to the quality of life compared to the one in which the engines of change are provided by the state and private sector. Of course, citizen initiatives must function under a regime of regulation formulated by the State, which itself must be driven by genuine democratic impulses --- again to be charted in a good measure by citizens' initiatives from the civil society.

But something seemed to be ailing civil society itself, the ailment manifesting in the form of several symptoms. The result has been that State continues to evoke a faith that is surprising, a faith that often leads to stultifying the civil society altogether. The situation seemed to require that the first steps should be in the form of civil society curing itself. This needed institutions that built self-correctives and accountability in their design. Indianising ASW was important because the message should not be that only an external agency can be driven by standards that are set by internal churning. Intensive discussions were held not only with the prospective decision-makers of the proposed Indian entity, but also grassroots partners and non-partners, and with ASW India chapter staff members.

Following deliberations, it was agreed that at Trust, rather than a society, would be formed with a mandatory advisory body to guide its work. To further the functioning of the Trust democratically, it was agreed that each trustee would retire after two terms, and staff would have a say in the induction of new trustee whenever trustees retire or a vacancy

arose otherwise. All the staff were to be invited to Trust meetings to promote transparency in decision-making. The India Chapter of ASW transformed into Centre for World Solidarity in 1992. ASW Berlin was willing to provide the resources meant for India work through decision-making of the Trust and staff of CWS. This marked an important change in the relationship between a resource agency founded in the North and a development-implementation agency functioning in the South and ASW India was wound up.

Growing CWS: Scaling up Mission, not Organisation

Indian grassroots groups in the early 1990s welcomed the newly founded Centre for World Solidarity and a wide range of development activists helped in the finalisation of the details of the transformation of ASW Indian Chapter into a wholly Indian Centre for World Solidarity. Indianising the ASW chapter facilitated its work with the State, and para-statal bodies best illustrated by the flowering of the Red-headed-hairy caterpillar project, which aimed at saving the castor crop through community action and non-pesticidal approach. This work started during the ASW phase, but picked pace with formation of CWS and eventually led to the founding of a specialised Centre for Sustainable Agriculture (CSA), a spin-off or incubatee of CWS⁷.

CWS now had the major part of the eastern coast and Bihar in its work area. Pressures were building for expansion into other States, but CWS decided that the work area was already huge for a small body like CWS with its limited funds being made available by ASW. The philosophy here was --- apart from resource limitation --- that experience in the four States of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh,

Orissa and Bihar would be enough and varied, and diverse enough, to constitute a good basis for constructing the concept of world solidarity and launching it. The groups were encouraged to work in depth on questions of environment, gender and the marginalised and, if focussed well, the group experience would be rich not only to contribute to the Indian policymaking but also had the potential to become slices towards the as yet emerging concept of world solidarity, the latter being the ultimate though distant aim of the effort. While there was determination to restrict the CWS work area, this was coupled with the willingness to be part of any initiatives which spilt across into other States without CWS becoming formal partner with groups in their ongoing work. This was in consonance with the ultimate objective of moving towards world solidarity.

The time, however, was ripe to worrying about even carefully controlled size bringing diminishing returns. CWS decided it would rather found specialising sister organisations and promote their work, than organising more and more work under its own roof. Thus were started a number of what came to be known as solidarity organisations.

ASW was the ordinary German's symbolic penance for that country's grave errors and the modest effort to rethink the North-South relationship. As part of its contribution to developing healthier North-South relationship, ASW transferred decision-making about its modest funds to India in so far as funds raised in Germany for India were concerned. CWS in a move that is rare in the Indian context followed similar ideas in creating, nurturing and incubating newer solidarity institutions. Other spin-off initiatives which came up reflected the

willingness of CWS and ASW to think differently in development matters.

Through a process of consultation, experimentation and assessment, a methodology was struck for people's management and control, and eventual decisive say, in the use of natural resources as the way to build and strengthen civil society in India. For this, it was important to seize those occasional opportunities that are provided by public policy to move decisively on this methodological track. Significant among these were the policy to launch watershed development in the public domain and the policy to give a say to forest dwellers in the management of forest resources, both policies having been unveiled in the 1990s. Public policies then though fragile and limited in scope provided a window for civil society for greater democratisation and people's control to prevent any simple or easy policy slide-back.

In contrast, was the set of ideas about sustainable agriculture. These were not in response to any specific public policy, and actually because of a glaring lack of comparable public policy. As hinted already, the sustainable agriculture initiative was incrementally visualised, starting with efforts to wean the farming community in selected pockets away from chemical pesticide usage, as this seemed to be pushing agricultural activities to the mercy of chemical giants. With notable success in this unidimensional work, eventually the Centre for Sustainable Agriculture emerged.

All the three activities --- watershed development⁸, forest management⁹ and sustainable agriculture¹⁰ --- commenced and continued for some years under the banner of CWS. This meant building subject matter specialist teams who

could work closely with CWS social scientists and activists, the latter specialising in gender and Dalit questions. With a view to scaling the mission rather than the organisation, CWS seriously got into forming independent institutes for maintaining the momentum to work on special subjects --- watershed development, forestry and sustainable agriculture. This was not just managerially effective but also effective in responding better to changes in the overall milieu and public policy around that subject matter and working on attitudes of government officials and making them more people-oriented.

An important element of the design or institutional architecture was to root democracy in the functioning and enabling people's voices and problems are heard before solutions proposed, something that existing public specialist institutions often lacked. The solidarity institutions made consultations with grassroots organisations mandatory. CWS annual meetings as also the WASSAN, CPF and CSA consultation processes have become reputed and worthwhile making their agendas different, giving all these bodies a chance to earn their niche in the development world. In other words, these institutions derive their agendas from civil society --- which in the process is built, strengthened and empowered¹¹. Also must be mentioned "Water and Livelihoods Foundation (WLF)"; a spin-off of CWS: this goes much beyond watershed-based approach to address water problems and has built-in research elements, which have been noticed by the engineering profession.

The overall milieu for civil society organisations has changed significantly in the last decade. Support from outside has dried up, and the

rules and regulations governing external funding have become somewhat stringent. The latest solidarity institution "Knowledge In Civil Society" (KICS) experienced this as it sought to raise larger questions on science and democracy. Questions that were probed and posed included: Is science and technology an esoteric pursuit in the conduct of which society is only a passive recipient. Is democratising S&T pursuits a possibility considering there is unquestionable impact of S&T on society, for better or worse? Can civil society also be recognised as a creator of knowledge which will be accepted by the Science and Technology establishment and S&T policymaking of the State?

The pursuit of these ideas through a Trust by name KICS has been hampered by questions from resource agencies like how many beneficiaries would be there through the work of KICS. Of course, in the long run, the society would be a beneficiary by the work of KICS, but obviously, there cannot be a head-count of beneficiaries each year to be credited to KICS. KICS in collaboration with other institutes came out with a citizen manifesto on science and technology that was inspired by Gandhi's Hind Swaraj. The Knowledge Swaraj document was a result of extensive consultations with civil society organisations and argued for a future based on new contract of science drawing from Gandhi's oceanic circles and trusteeship ideas and applying them to knowledge futures. It proposed a triad of sustainability, plurality and (cognitive) justice that would create newer science policy that saw citizens as participants in science policy and not just as recipients of the fruits of S&T. The manifesto was also followed by four pilots on diverse areas of health and medical ethics; sustainable agriculture

and knowledge systems; water democracy; and on rooting plurality in building sustainable habitats¹².

Experiences of CWS in Democracy and Networking

The dimensions introduced into solidarity institutions are transparency, and responses and accountability to grassroots impulses and aspirations. Towards this, the annual meetings of the grassroots bodies are built into their work methods. Their board meetings are not closed shops but have the participation of staff members as also selected representatives of the grassroots bodies. Inputs to the work agenda from grassroots and accountability to them, are the newer ways of functioning, marking a break from what has been in vogue historically.

At the heart of this approach by CWS is recognition of the primacy of decision-making built into the non-governmental organisations. The right to form associations for locally addressing people's issues is central to civil society --- a right which was not suspended even during the internal emergency, 1975-77. That the decision-making is central to each NGO and that this is cherished by the NGOs is the most important characteristic of the civil society. It is important to recognise that civil society work so enabled is important for democracy in the country at large to flourish. Such healthy civil society and Gandhi's ideas of healthy Panchayats linked to one another into oceanic circles could be the answer to several problems bedevilling the society today like drawing more than what Earth can provide, global warming and other well-marked challenges of today.

On the other hand, we also see NGOs which have added skills to their armoury have been more

effective in this internet era. The message from our experience in the civil society is that it should pursue its work guided by excellence and quality of the work. Those members of the civil society which are unable to re-invent themselves will be left on the way-side, and rightly so.

Lessons and Challenges to the Civil Society

Civil Society had an excellent opening because of the Gandhian push to constructive work in the pre-independence era. But the euphoria of the first independence decade on what State could do, resulted in the State stealing the clothes, as it were, of the incipient civil society. It took a while for non-governmental work to attain some self-identity when the first Prime Minister started worrying about the absence of people's own initiatives in the five-year plans and the community development efforts under the official aegis. The potential of the innovative Directive Principles to put life into the idea of Panchayati Raj was realised at a time when Statism became the dominant force, a phenomenon not quite dented by the non-governmental efforts in the form of Bhoodan movement (for instance). Somehow, all non-governmental efforts could never manage to hold their own vis-a-vis the State. Civil society became and continued to be a poor cousin which could function at the sufferance of the State machinery. The unequal relationship manifested in the form of lack of pride on the part of the civil society and the be-all attitude of the State and parastatal bodies.

It is in such context that the vision of a stalwart like V. Krishna Murty helped in the civil society coming to its own. Under his leadership, efforts to put dimensions like transparency and accountability into civil society were made. But the rubric of civil society was never homogeneous, and

the cherished freedom of association was misused as much as utilised properly, with the government never playing a proper enabler role.

The preponderance of civil society was rather rudderless in its work. Self-corrective methods were not employed, nor were efforts made to equip the civil society work with science and technology tools, which alone would renew civil society and make it relevant in a fast-changing globalised world. Increasing globalisation meant the generality of civil society was more prone to pressures that it was ill-equipped to comprehend. The challenge to civil society is remembering the Gandhian constructive work for practice, but the complexion of this has to change through the employment of S&T tools.

We have tried to illustrate the challenges to civil society through a less-celebrated experiment and example of the work of Centre for World Solidarity (CWS) with active help and involvement of the German Action for World Solidarity. The journey of CWS has enabled civil society organisations working with it to move on the path of transparency and accountability: its promotion of other solidarity institutes has helped to give a different colour to a slice of civil society.

What is needed is the replication of ideas, bonding with other civil society bodies for consolidation, and looking beyond Indian frontiers, where warranted, to strengthen grassroots-based world solidarity. Interestingly, in an insightful, albeit anguished note in 1964, the eminent historian and Gandhian Dharampal asked: "What is the role of the Gandhians, the constructive workers and all those who are engaged in varied voluntary activities in the post-1947 era?" Dharampal raises four Gandhian paths, so to speak, on post-Gandhian work¹³.

Dharampal bemoans later day Gandhians' failure to resist authority when it is abused", which according to Gandhiji was a pre-condition of real Swaraj. Dharampal made a plea to Gandhians to "put away their own fanciful ideas, theories and solutions no matter of what origin, and begin to listen to the people". In his own way, VK in his personal life and through the institutions he helped found, asked deeper questions on democracy and Swaraj. In seeking to create autonomous institutions such as CSA, WASSAN, etc., CWS too has sought to, in some small way, translate the difficult ideas of creating

'oceanic circles' encouraging founders of civil society organisations to see themselves as trustees or mid-wives and not as overbearing parents. The wonderful metaphor of the oceanic circle by Gandhi in 1946 remains uncharted territory. As Parel (2008) has suggested, the concept was Gandhi's idea of a civil nation, building on the broader concept of civil nationalism in Hind Swaraj, a vision that was consciously non-hierarchical, inclusive, where the (Indian) individual could belong to many, small inner circles, while espousing a larger non-violent and peaceful world order.

NOTES

1. "The Long term strategy of National Movement" – Bipin Chandra, Indian National Movement th Long-term Dynamics, New Delhi, 1988. Re-published in "India's struggle for Independence" revised and updated, Bipin Chandra et al, Penguin, 1988.
2. "Gandhi: A Life" by Krishna Kriplani, p,179, National Book Trust, 1985, New Delhi. Quoted in "Gandhi Management" by Ram Pratap, Jaico 2009.
3. 'On Technology', p.43, in "Understanding Gandhi" by Dharampal, Other India Books, Goa, 2003 .
4. For a possible way of fusing Gandhi's Hind Swaraj and Oceanic Circles ideas see Sastri, M V (2011). "The Gadfly as a Harbinger" <https://dlc.dlib.indiana.edu/dlc/bitstream/handle/10535/7298/1325.pdf>.
5. See Shambu Prasad (2001) for such an exploration for his views on science.
6. AktionsgemeinschaftSolidarischeWelt in German. <https://www.aswnet.de/en.html>.
7. For more details on the project and its successful scaling up process of the Non Pesticidal Man agement movement see <http://krishi.tv/videos/npm-seeding-the-new-knowledge-movement/> also Quartz (2011).
8. In 1997 with support from CWS and District Water Management Agency (DWMA) the Watershed Support Services & Activities Network(WASSAN's)tried to ensure the spirit of new Government Guidelines for watershed development projects were realized on the ground.For more details on work on watershedsand rainfed area policy see <https://www.wassan.org/theme/watershed-man-agement>.

9. The Centre for People's Forestry (CPF) was set up in 2002 to enable the emancipation of the forest dwelling/dependent and other resource poor communities through the realisation of their rights and access, control and management of their natural resources in a sustainable way.<https://cpf.in/about/>.
10. The Centre for Sustainable Agriculture was set up in 2004 that evolved from the evolved from the sustainable agriculture desk of Centre for World Solidarity (www.cwsy.org) from 1998<http://csa-india.org/who-we-are/>.
11. While the three independent land-based programmes made impressive progress, with CWS hand-holding to start with, and independently later, two other solidarity bodies --- National Dalit Forum (NDF) and Tribal-Dalit-Bahujan Front BODHI have not taken off despite CWS special help. It was hoped in NDF that the word Dalit would include Bahujans and Adivasis an idea that was ahead of its time and was counter to the existing hegemonistic order that saw them as antagonistic.
12. The Knowledge Swaraj document or manifesto is available at <http://kicsforum.net/kics/kicsmatters/Knowledge-swaraj-an-Indian-S&T-manifesto.pdf> and a Handbook based on four pilots is available at http://kicsforum.net/kics/setdev/Piloting_Knowledge_Swaraj.pdf.
13. Were Gandhians to sketch the future society of their varied dreams and to practice it in the present in the best way they can? Or were they to, through personal example, help in the setting up of better standards in various fields of human endeavor? Were Gandhians to be at the beck and call of the Swarajya government. dedicated to the welfare state; to do all that which it wishes to be done by them; or were they, in the words of Gandhiji, to see their main task to help the people in "the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused" and further "educating the masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority" (Dharampal, 2003).

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