

SATYAGRAHA, SWARAJ, REMEMBERING - COMING HOME TO OURSELVES

Sara J. Wolcott*

Introduction by Editor

"It is hard to imagine the cataclysm of history today, the armed conflict which brought the most disastrous consequences in the history of mankind", said the Polish President, Andrej Duda recently in an event commemorating the 80th anniversary of the World War II. The German President apologised to the Polish people for the violence¹. A few years ago, speaking among the British, an Indian Parliamentarian sought reparation for the British atrocities in India. Through out the world, there is an increasing reconciling to the ill effects of the colonisation, different wars and the cost it had on the people, particularly those who were conquered and /or subjugated through colonisation.

How we behaved in the past tells us the story of what guided as a culture at some point of time. Culture, is a system of values, a web of meanings. By definition, values, meanings and the systems based on or incorporating them are incomparable. There is in reality no independent standard in relation to which one could compare Indian, Chinese, Euro-American, or African culture to come up with a result of one being better or superior to the rest². However, how we deal with the past tells us something about the culture of today. As Prof. U. R. Ananthamurthy summarises about our dilemmas we face in responding to our own culture today, the world appears to be divided between revivalists and modernists. The revivalists are insensitive to injustice, inequality, and the meaningless superstitions in our culture....but, European rationalism is itself quite insensitive to larger questions, and insensitive to other ways of knowing and being. ..in this situation it becomes very difficult for anyone to be truthful to one's own vision, living as we are in a divided culture³. Dominant cultures backed by wealth leave the maximum traces on a society. They have texts describing their ideas, icons in stones and metal, and their architectural forms indicate their religion and social preferences⁴. Culture, even where it constitutes heritage is not static, whether

* Rev. Sara J. Wolcott is an Eco-Theologian based out of New York. Trained in International Development, experienced in working in several continents on development projects, she often alludes to the influence of Gandhi in the civil rights movement in USA, particularly the influence on Rev. Thurman. She helps institutions and individuals to de-colonise their lives and cultures and helps build new cultures and rituals in families, communities and institutions. She is the founder Director of the Eco-Theology company Sequoia Samanvaya based out of San Francisco and also works with family legacies through the Wolcott Legacies. More details of her work available here - <https://www.sequoiasamanvaya.com/>

as object or idea, or the social structure on which society rests, although it is often treated as such by us in the present. In claiming an ancestry for it, we are inducting the past into the present and thereby giving it continuity⁵.

Correcting historical narratives is a way of asserting/reclaiming a cultural continuity. While the Indian narratives today are struggling to place a diverse dynamic culture as frozen in pre-Colonial time befitting the interests and priorities of the modern Indian societies on one side, it also struggles with the inherent conflicts in the ideological, philosophical, linguistic and social narratives that such a vast diverse nation throws up. Many of the debates in our current society are to do with these conflicts and its articulations. This resultant divided culture is what today we contend with often and as Ananthamurthy points out, being truthful to oneself is a collateral damage.

While the cultural conflicts remain, the global knowledge streams have already produced a plethora of diverse and rich narratives that have challenged the Colonial ones. In India and in the global South (or the subjugated and colonised lands), the scholarship of people such as Dharampal, Ashish Nandy, Claude Alvares among others have contributed to the above. The genre of writing that created a counter-narrative is collectively called as the 'non-euro-centric' ones.

If these are the conflicts of our country, what are the conflicts of the colonisers? how does a coloniser deal with the trauma of the past and the truth of their ancestors? Where does that lead them to in current times, does the reconciliation lead to better understanding and appreciation of the native cultures? In this first person essay, the Eco-Theologian, Rev. Sara J. Wolcott from New York presents the story of her own family and ancestors and the difficulty to come to terms with the colonisation, and, how in reconciling and reconnecting with the positives of ones' heritage one is able to move forward. It holds a lot of relevance to the Indian context where increasingly a large section of society is stepping out of the social inequalities that its ancestors sustained over a long period and need to reconcile the same without harming itself in the present times.

I write to you from the historical homeland of the Lenape⁷ people. Several centuries ago, the Lenape grew corn here, and squash and beans. The soil was rich. Streams and creeks, brooks and rivers filled with fish traversed the landscape. Trees grew tall and lush and deer ambled amongst them, forming a path that the people followed. When the birds took flight from the lakes they were of so great a number that their flight blocked out the sun. The land was well cared for and the people were (usually) tall, strong and healthy. It was a world of such rich bio-diversity and such healthy people that any of the major environmental, agricultural or medical organisations today would surely look to it as a model of well-being for people and place alike.

Today, I have to send in the soil from my garden to be sampled for testing to see if it has any heavy metals poisonous to humans before I plant corn. I am sure that the soil, long polluted from various industries and gang warfare, misses the sweet corn and the nurturing beans and squash that once covered it in small plots like my own. The streams and creeks have been buried under the concrete; place names like "Brook Street" remind us that once there was a bubbling brook filled with fish; now there is a small shop that sells frozen fish that is flown in. The Lenape people are still here, but you have to know where to find them; few remember their sacred sites. The deer path that once was one of the major trading routes for dozens of indigenous tribes is now a street called Broadway. The common name for this place is New York City. Gandhi would have seen this as one of the hearts of Civilisation, which he described as a disease and prayed that India would never be reduced to the same state as Europe⁸.

More often than not, the telling of history has dis-membered people from place. In the place where I am, memories of what was before the land was "civilised", leading to "development" are rarely re-examined. A social convention has arisen: a collective narrative that says that this sweltering metropolis is not only far superior to the lush landscapes that preceded it but that we might as well not think about those landscapes; we might as well forget the people who lived there. The people who cared for this land for centuries are thus often erased from New Yorker's history. To be erased from history is to be erased from our collective identity formation. That the Lenape and other nations still live here and are reclaiming their languages and their ceremonies and their seeds is a fact that continues to pass under the general population's radar. That this reclaiming of traditional knowledge, from the language to the mythology to the planting cycles, is deemed by the United Nations to be of critical importance for climate adaptation also is ignored by the national government of a country who likes to see itself as the greatest country on earth, for all that it has significantly contributed to a climate that is changing so fast that farmers in the middle of the United States, the country's agricultural heartland, are deeply worried about this year's crops⁹. The very forests that were cut down to build and feed this city (and others) are now understood to be critical to planetary health and well-being¹⁰.

But I ReMember. Or rather I am on a journey of ReMembering, a journey that is propelled by a certain kind of force that comes from within me, but is also not of me, a force that guides and supports me even as I am caught up in it. I reMember: my connection to the Divine; the places where my people have been dismembering; the spiritually

somatic, practically divine, ethically nuanced narratives and actions for a rejoining of people and place; livelihoods and joy; culture and prosperity. I am reMembering my inheritance.

When I started this journey of ReMembering I tried to explain this force that guided me, even, at times, coaching me. At first, I used the term "God." But that term means so many things, to so many people, and it is so big, so very big, too big perhaps to be used by a small person such as myself, for all that I carry such formal titles as Minister and Priestess and healer. It is a force that makes a journey that others will say is quite challenging seem to me to be overflowing with joy. Oh, people say when I hear of the practice of ReMembering, how brave you are! You have such courage! Such conviction! I am not so sure about these things.

Mostly I am sure that there is a force, a force that seems to encompass my soul, which guides me towards greater truthfulness in how I understand where I come from and who I am and, thus, where I am going, are impressed by seem quite ordinary – how could I do otherwise than to engage in this practice of ReMembering? And now I have begun to teach others this practice, to bring other people into small circles where they too can learn to work with time in order to reconstruct how we engage with space. And they too are experiencing that force that compels them on a search for the truth of our land, of our people, of ourselves. A truth that we have been taught is unimportant. But as you may know it does not matter what your education has been, if your education is not true it will not carry you to your true self, and without that then who are you and what on earth are you doing with your precious life? After all, as the great theologian Howard Thurman, who was

part of the first group of black intelligentsia from the United States to travel to India and met with Gandhi and who was amongst those who brought back and helped to translate Gandhian thought into the American context, once said:

"There is something in every one of you that waits and listens for the sound of the genuine in yourself. It is the only true guide you will ever have. And if you cannot hear it, you will all of your life spend your days on the ends of strings that somebody else pulls."¹¹

And we who have been experimenting with these practices of ReMembering, none all of which are in any way codified or institutionalised or anything so formal, we find that in this practice we come closer to that "sound of the genuine." We are drawn towards this sound by a force that is within all people: a force that stems from the power of truth itself; that stems from our souls, regardless of our religious tradition or lack thereof.

And of course, as you know, there is a name for such a force. It has been called the most powerful force. The most compelling of forces. An alternative to brutish force; can it not also be an alternative to the force of what the great philosopher Hannah Arendt referred to as the root cause of all totalitarianism: the banality of evil? That force that enables the upholding of social, familial and cultural convention even when that convention is destroying the very support systems of life itself? Indeed, the more I sit with it, the more the term "soul/truth force" seems most appropriate as a way of describing the guiding means within the practice of ReMembering.

As you know there is already a word for this in a non-English language. Gandhi's community

coined the term “satyagraha,” or “truth force” or “soul force” to refer to the force that enabled their freedom sans violence. Satyagraha is commonly translated into the English language as “non-violence.” It was brought over from India by Howard Thurman, whom I mentioned above, and a powerful network of friends who took it upon themselves to change the course of history. Since it landed on this shore, the concept has taken root in a soil that has long known the stifling pain of colonisation.

In my country, non-violence has been credited with altering the course of the Vietnam War, winning the struggle for Civil Rights, gay rights, feminist rights, and a host of other small and large efforts to challenge existing political laws and practices deemed immoral to soul of the citizen who loves his/her country. It continues to be a favored option, and there continue to be many training programmes across the country on non-violence, especially non-violent direct action, and those here who are working to build one of Gandhi’s last dreams, the dream of Shanti Sena or Peace Army. Young people are continuing to be inspired by and to use non-violence. Emma Gonzalez¹² in America and Greta Thunberg¹³ from Sweden are amongst those of the next generation who are using the force of truth in an attempt to end the rampant gun violence and ecological violence.

Thus, even without being located in India, I am well aware that to use the term satyagraha for something that does not fit within the common parlance of non-violence is itself a bold and perhaps risky or even arrogant move. And yet I hope to show you, here, how ReMembering is part of the overarching pathway towards swaraj, towards freedom, for our times, and is very much a part of

the force of truth, or satyagraha. In doing so may, perhaps all forms of educators to take seriously the radical (as in deeply rooted) work of ReMembering, regardless if they are teaching how to plant or how to read or how to transform an organisation. As satyagraha has guided our small experiments in ReMembering, let ReMembering be added to the breadth and depth of the global engagement with Satyagraha and Swaraj.

Where does One Start, with Satyagraha or ReMembering?

Let us start where we are: with the context of our times. For as Ramasubramanian reminds us in his Introduction to this journal, Gandhi was a man of his times. He consistently reminded his audiences that his thought, including his language and the definitions of his terminology, stemmed from his context. He had no interest in being bound by irrelevant conventions much less the “stupidity of consistency.” Gandhi’s context was a conflict between a group of people (generally referred to as Indians) that sought liberation from an intruder (English) in which he was on the side of the “victim”. He was continually fighting against a definable enemy (the colonial British rule) for a clear outcome (Swaraj).

My context is that my ancestors (the English) were the intruders and colonisers on indigenous (generally referred to as Indians or Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island) land. Through brute force, the chance of biological disease (especially small pox which decimated the original inhabitants of what is now the United States and severely impacted politics¹⁴) and ideas that they

borrowed from a variety of indigenous as well as European sources, they crafted a society and with it an ecology that served the purposes of an Empire ruled by a minority “democracy” (no white women, no non-Christians, no black people, no Indians, were allowed to participate in the initial governance of the country¹⁵) in so far as it perpetuated property ownership and ongoing inequality.

My context is that the traditional ecological knowledge of the Americas, which includes a wide host of agricultural, governance, forestry, fire management, and the wisdom of centuries of human adaptation to various forms of climatic changes of the land, has been dis-membered from the collective narrative of the dominant Civilisation. Our context is not one of fighting an invader who uses brute force. We live in the brute: the fight for freedom happens in small ways every day. Gandhi had villages to learn from: we lost most of our villages years ago. Slowly, more of us are finding ways to learn from the indigenous peoples as our national story tends to erase. More often than not, when people seek solutions, they rely on technologies that too often either worsen existing problems (ie, airplane flights or large scale tractors for monocultural crops) or which rely upon precious minerals that are not sustainable (ie, for the functioning of laptops and cell phones), and my people and my generation are notorious for being obsessed with their phones, an obsession shared by much of the world’s population. My context is that my people are often lonely, depressed, and often physically sick. My context is that our way of life – from our macro political economies to our micro economies are by and large, continuing to destroy life on earth. And yet for most of my people, they would have no income if they stopped driving, flying, or in other ways using

fossil fuels: their lives are so utterly embedded in a non-sustainable system that they struggle to even imagine another form of existence. While there is a clear enemy (non-sustainability) and a clear goal of freedom from such evil, few Americans can fully extract themselves from that evil. We are dependent upon it, not only for our food, but, perhaps far more importantly, for our identity. You see, Gandhi was working with a population that knew of a self-identity that was not utterly linked to the British Raj. He recognised that the vast majority of the country maintained an ancient tradition informed by land and stories and simple practices because the example was in front of him. Too often, my people have lost that memory as the example has been shunned and ridiculed. We are seeking to reclaim it. We are seeking to ReMember. Not only to re-narrate, but to “ReMember” is to bring the body and the soul and the mind (the storytelling) together again. It is a somatic act as much as a narrative one. That is why I capitalise the “M” capitalised: to help the reader recall that it is the “members” of the human-earth body that are returning to right relationship with one another.

To ReMember: it is amidst the most ancient of practices shared across religions. Muslims pray five times a day to remember Allah. One of the practices of prayer is actually translated to as “remembrance”. Jewish high holidays and many cultural practices attest to remembering: remember that you were slaves in Egypt, they say to one another on Seder, their high holiday, a ritual that has been practiced for several thousand years. Remember that God brought you out of Egypt and taught you to be free. And of course Jesus says, on his last meal with his disciples, referred to as the Last Supper, as he breaks the bread and passes the wine:

Eat, for this is my body. Drink, for this is my blood. And every time you do this, do so in remembrance of me. Those words have become the sacred words uttered over the communion table in churches and cathedrals and home gatherings around the world, from eastern orthodox to protestant parishes. Do this in remembrance of Me.

So the first and last act of Remembrance is a re-collection of our spiritual selves, of the Atman, the untarnished, forever strong soul that dwells within all of us.

And within each of these commandments we can see a recognition of human forgetfulness. There are many terms: forgetfulness, illusion, sin, evil, separation. While these terms do not all mean the same thing and it would be inappropriate to oversimplify any of their associated traditions by saying they are all the same, they do all act as a chorus of voices recognising that within the human form is this tendency to forget our true nature.

It is too common amongst those who seek a human-ecological spiritual reconnection to focus on the human-earth connection and not to attend to the forces of our disconnection. And yet we would not be reminded to remember if the spiritual masters of old did not understand the tendency towards disconnection. We must attend not only to our connection, but to the accurate interpretation and understanding of our disconnection, lest we re-member ourselves incorrectly. All too often this happens and people do not put the right pieces together again.

And so in the context of my times, it is necessary to engage with the deep sources of our individual, familial and collective human-earth

identity. With how we tell stories; with whose stories do we attend to when we refer to our own. To engage with stories is to engage with the body, for our stories are held in our bodies; we enact them in our songs and our dances, in the way we build our buildings and how we construct and care for our streets, our towns, our cities, our fields, farms and forests. The human-earth connection, be it paving dirt for roads or planting seeds to grow a forest always enacts a set of values, almost always bound up in narratives and continuous re-interpretations of the Good, the True and the Just.

As we do so, we engage with the laws our society has formed. Gandhi was very clear and spoke widely about the importance of the law. God followed his own laws; anything else would not make him God. The sun follows the laws of the sun, without which we would have neither day nor night. Truthfulness and full self-expression is an expression of obeying our own laws; our own conscience. To obey a law set up by a government because it is the government demeans both the individual self and the government, which we can see as a formation of our collective selves (for we are not as separate from our government as we may wish to believe).

I live in a context that has many rules about how I am to engage with the earth and the people of the earth. My family, who has been on this continent for nearly 400 years, has been part of the process of creating laws of social convention that are in actuality far more powerful than the laws of government – which they also helped to create. For many a good law is passed that is subsequently not obeyed, or obeyed in strange ways, because the overarching culture and the mindset of the people is not able to bring it into line with the rest of their

lives. Perhaps they intend to break it; perhaps they do not. How many legal agreements have been set up and then ignored; promises made only to be broken; documents signed only to gather dust? Yes, there is much to be gained from working with the law and with governments – I do not say there is not! But let us not forget the wider work of cultural change, the work of story and song, of myth and film, of poetry and drama, of education for all ages, of family stories shared in the quiet of the evening and enacted throughout our lives. The social conventions – the laws – that govern these spaces set the context out of which politics and economics can grow. No society can be sustainable without a sustainable culture. No culture can be sustainable until its origin stories and its growth stories reflect the possibility for a continued sustainable life. To do this we must engage in ReMembering.

We all know that a sustainable life is a life of peace and good will towards one another and all beings whom we share life with on this precious earth; of responsibility for past, present and future generations; of regeneration of soil and water and livelihoods. This is the condition from which all forms of swaraj stem.

And yet that life, our rightful inheritance as children of the Divine, has been stolen from us. We, especially Americans, are stealing it from our children. We have collectively become disinherited.

At this point, it is worth looking at a story that Gandhi relates in the eighth chapter of *Hind Swaraj*. Gandhi understood the power of storytelling. Here, he tells the story of a man who is robbed. He presents two options of a possible response to the man. At first, the conventional option, the man who is robbed becomes very upset and in various

ways chases after or attempts to harm the robber for stealing his property. Regardless of his action, he loses his peace of mind and his own internal freedom becoming increasingly frightened and with his fear becomes increasingly separate from the world around him, thus losing his connection with his own soul. In the second version of the story, the man recognises that the robber is sick. He does not lose his peace of mind. Instead, he seeks to cure the sickness by making his household items readily available to him; giving of him more of his own things. The robber keeps robbing from him – but then he becomes, in Gandhi's words, "agitated." He proceeds to ask around the town and finds out how good the man is. Eventually, he is so touched by the heart of the other that he quits his robbing ways and becomes a servant of the one from whom he robs.

Now I read that story from my context and I find myself, associate myself and my ancestors not with the one who is robbed from but with the robber. For I am clear that my ancestors stole this land from its original inhabitants. And they stole the labour after they stole people from the continent of Africa. And maybe they didn't do all the stealing themselves, but they certainly were complicit in the creation of a society built on theft, and the illusion that rape and pillage, be it of earth or people, can possibly be a means to create a society of "freedom."

The key word, the word upon which the story spins, is that the robber experiences agitation. Without that internal agitation, he will simply continue stealing. He is disturbed by the goodness of the other; he is disturbed also, perhaps, by the truth-seeking force within him which is able to be activated, which is the source even, of his agitation.

Now I can look at US history and my family history and I can wonder, were they agitated? And the answer is, not enough. Am I agitated? Yes. Enough? Hard to say. The deeper I go into this work, the more my yearning for a certain kind of purity increases. Now what does this mean for me? Does it mean that I work to give back the land that my ancestors stole? It might. Many of my students have taken on land reform, including voluntarily giving away parts of their inheritance to indigenous peoples. We are not yet at the place that Vinoba was during his great work of land reform and bhoodan, but I regularly hear of churches, individuals and others who are looking more seriously into land reform. Not as a form only of repentance, but as a form of joy. And there is with this a deep fear – a fear of giving up property, not only personal property, but the very notion of property itself. Possibly, this is the most radical part of ReMembering, for it forces us who are quite comfortable to become uncomfortable, and to re-examine, in the most intimate of ways, our relationship with the institutions of property.

Possibly, but I actually do not want to declare as of yet what is most radical. Because we are still young in this movement, and the best is yet to come.

What else does this mean? Does it mean being in a fundamentally different relationship with the original caretakers of the land? Most certainly. Does it mean re-viewing everything I know about the environment, from the causes of its destruction to the potential solutions, with a new perspective? Yes. Critically, whichever way it leads people, it leads them to tell new stories, and the process, and their experience, may entail a certain (I would say light) degree of suffering and discomfort. But primarily, it is an experience of joy. To ReMember what we are

trained to forget has been for me an entirely joyful experience, one that has returned me and continues to return me to increasingly better variations of myself. It is ongoing; which is to say it is a path of continual revelation; of ongoing betterment through the kind of light that is best found in the darkness of the unknown, in the darkness of the soil where the roots are formed and can become reformed.

Example: ReMembering my family history anew. Let me illustrate what I mean with a personal story of ReMembering.

I had been taught what most well-educated people had been taught about the history of climate change: that the great ecological, social and economic crisis of our age stems from the industrial revolution. After over a decade of working internationally in variations of climate adaptation, I found myself in an eco-justice conference in New York which was attended by members of the Indian Law Alliance¹⁷, an indigenous-led organisation headed by members of the Haudenosaunee Nation in upstate New York. I asked them what they wanted help with. They said, rescinding the Doctrine of Discovery, which is generally seen as one of the beginnings of colonisation. I said to myself, what does the Doctrine of Discovery¹⁸ – what does colonisation in general – have to do with climate change? I realised they interpreted the truth about the origin of climate change different than I did. My narrative did not include their perspective, and if I believed (as I did) that indigenous perspectives are critical to engaging with climate change, then I had to include their perspective of the origin of climate change into my perspective. But it still did not make sense to me – so I began a long journey of piecing

together a series of historical puzzle pieces until the picture became clear. My indigenous friends were correct. Colonisation has been dis-membered from the larger ecological crisis narrative. This is part of an overarching and highly dangerous white-washing of the relationship between human beings and the earth, one that tends to dis-locate the appropriate role of the human beings in relationship to her fellow creatures. My research into this topic became my Masters of Divinity Thesis at Union Theological Seminary¹⁹ which is affiliated with Columbia University and has since become the subject of courses that I teach via my ecotheology education organisation, Sequoia Samanvaya.

In the process, I began to look at my own family history. Indigenous people do not separate societal stories and personal stories the way that my academic training tended to do: the person is not seen as separate from her society. Nor, we might note, does Gandhi; his life and his practice of satyagraha deeply integrated the personal and the societal, including the political.

Before long, it became clear that just as the environmental movement had erased colonisation from its history, so too did my family – and my nation. I was shocked to “discover” what has always been there: the vast erasures of indigenous peoples or black people in the stories I learned about my early family history. My family taught me the name of the ship that my ancestor Henry Wolcott sailed on to the Massachusetts Bay Colony (the William and Mary) in 1630, but not the name of the people he encountered when he arrived: the Massachusetts. We remember his role in establishing the First Parish Church of Dorchester (1631) and buying his first 100 acres of land, but not the fate of the people

from whom he bought it. We remember his 100-mile trek by foot to establish what would become the town of Windsor, Connecticut, but not the complex dynamics of the mixture of Dutch traders and multiple tribal groups that he found there. We remember the role his congregation played in the Fundamental Orders of 1639²⁰, the first written constitution in the world that expressed the rights of the people to govern themselves, but not how the Podunk people helped him and his fellow settlers survive the Great Winter of 1635, when the small Congregationalist community of 28 families almost perished from the cold and from their lack of preparations and provisions. We remember – and still have a map of – the town where he and his son lived – but no one in my family ever told me that his son, also named Henry, owned Cyrus, the first black slave in the state of Connecticut.

Now let us be clear. I could easily have succumbed to fear, or hatred, or anger – three emotions which Gandhi and Howard Thurman specifically seek to bolster the satyagrahi against. I could have become afraid of how the descendants of those people whom my ancestors killed and enslaved would now treat me. Indeed, that fear did arise. Would they seek justice, and if so, what would happen to me and to my family? I could have hated my ancestors. I could have been deeply angry – at them, at the civilisation that created them, at myself for the role I play in perpetuating it, however unwillingly. All of these are possible and they all happened to various degrees, and yet that is not the force of the soul that guides me. Instead I keep going, finding a way of ReMembering that honors everyone – victim and perpetrator, ancestor and ancestor’s neighbor, alike. For this is a path of love and joy. And the more I go down it, the more

the former narratives and the land economics and politics attached to them become, as Gandhi might say, repugnant to my conscience. Increasingly, to render obedience to the laws of social convention which dis-member me from the land and the people of the land in my narratives as well as in my action is difficult.

What happens when I ReMember? I see the story of my family and of our nations' founding differently. The origins of the United States, and my family's survival, very much depended upon our capacity to learn from indigenous peoples. This means that the values of pioneering, innovation, and creating new cultures is one that, in my family lineage, are values dependent upon collaboration, the aptitude to learn across differences and engaging in cross-cultural dialogue around the most critical issues of food, security, water, clothing and social relationships. It means that when I now reach out to indigenous peoples in the United States, I am enacting an ancient and foundational tradition within my own national and familial lineage.

Collaboration with indigenous peoples is not the stated value of most environmental movements, or of the nation (Empire) of the United States, or even of my own Wolcott Family. It is not recognised as part of what enables us settlers to survive. It is not recognised as key for all forms of innovation, especially when confronting ecological challenges. Given our current ecological crisis which, as Gandhi alludes to, results from what is often referred to as "civilisation" and what others experience as colonisation, these collaborative forms of survival and innovation are absolutely essential for our collective survival.

As I realised these connections, my sense of

my inheritance shifted and as it did so, my identity shifted. I no longer became the descendent of one of the founding families of a country that presents itself with the arrogance of being the greatest countries of earth. I am the descendent of one of the founding families of a people who understood cross-cultural friendship, collaboration and humility – at least some of the time. My inheritance is so much richer than I had ever imagined, even as it also is filled with horrific violence. For in no way can the focus on the positive values be used to side step or avoid the wrong doing that my ancestors did. That cannot nor should it be denied. I am compelled by a force of truth, a force that is within and even guided by my soul: I cannot deny the violence. But nor can I deny the moments, perhaps countless, of love, brotherhood, peace and co-existence. To these values I can now turn with greater courage. As I do so, I come far, far closer to hearing what Thurman referred to as the "sound of the genuine" within me. I come far closer to being capable of dis-entangling myself from the massive knot of Civilisation; far closer to the Truth of the Truth.

Us ReMemberers are in the early stages of our efforts. My students are telling their own histories differently, which leads to them telling their children different stories about who they are and where they come from and what it means to be a good person. Gandhi encourages Satyagrahis to "mobilise public opinion against the evil which is to be eradicated by means of wide agitation." I cannot claim that we are as yet fully engaging in "wide agitation". My students narrate new stories at conferences and gatherings, around camp fires and in classrooms that they frequent. We have not yet "mobilised public opinion." We do not at the moment take vows, perhaps because there are

so many promises that have been made and then broken on this soil that I am far more concerned with ensuring right action than strong language. Our language has weakened from all that has been said and never fulfilled.

But it means that as I ReMember, I know that I am deepening into a lineage of people who are far more diverse, far more complex, and far more nuanced than I had grown up to believe. Appreciating the complexity of the past enables me to better understand the complexity of the

present. Appreciating those moments, however few and however very much betrayed, of cross-cultural bridges that enabled a new country to form gives me a well of spiritual resources that I can draw upon as climate change, sends her fires and floods and dry spells to my country, a consequence of centuries of violence. As Gandhi said, civilisation will destroy itself. It is our hope now that civilisation will not destroy all of the immense bio-cultural diversity that has been humanity's greatest source of wealth for generations.

NOTES

1. As reported in the Guardian - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/sep/01/german-president-asks-poland-for-forgiveness-at-ww2-ceremony>
2. Pg. xix., *Decolonizing History* by Claude Alvares, Other India Press, Goa, 1991
3. *Indian Culture An End of the Century View*, U.R. Ananthamurthy, 3rd Kappen Memorial Lecture, Bangaluru 1998
4. P.7, *Indian Culture as Heritage*, by Romila Thapar, Aleph Book Company, 2018
5. P.8, *ibid.*,
6. The Indian Multiversity Alliance has an online library where many of these publications are made available free of cost
7. Lenape is one of the several tribal nations of the Native Americans, the current land where
8. New York and New Jersey sit were originally inhabited by Lenape among other tribes. *Hind Swaraj*, pg 34
9. <https://www.kcci.com/article/midwest-flooding-has-killed-livestock-ruined-harvests-and-has-farmers-worried-for-their-future/26916440>

10. <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/srccl/>
11. This quote, one of Thurman's most famous, came from his 1980 commencement address at Spelman College. For those interested in going deeper into Thurman's work, no better beginning can be found than *Jesus and the Disinherited*, a little book that has impacted Thurman's students in the same way that did Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*. Indeed, Martin Luther King Jr carried Thurman's book with him throughout his lectures and meetings across the South during the civil rights movement.
12. Emma Gonzalez is the young American student who has become the face of the student's up raising against the gun lobby. She and her fellow students were victims of a mass shooting in the school in Parkland, Florida in Feb 2018.
13. Greta Thurnberg is the Swedish student who sat on a Climate Strike outside her school demand ing that the Climate Change crisis be seen as an emergency and immediate remedial measure be taken. She has inspired several school students across the world to go on strike representing the next generation demanding a fairer deal from the current adult generation making global decisions in policy and politics
14. Small pox has been proven to have been introduced into the Americas by the invading Euro peans through the voyages of 'discovery', including that of Colombo. More on this reading availa ble from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1775%E2%80%93North_American_smallpox_epidem ic
15. America didn't have voting rights to all its citizens well into the 1970s and even today there are Native Americans being denied their rightful voting rights. More on this reading here <https://changewire.org/our-vote-is-our-power-a-brief-history-of-voting-rights-in-america/>
16. The Bhoodan movement of Vinobha Bhave, one of the close associates of Gandhi is today seen with awe across the world as perhaps the largest voluntary land re-distribution move ment in History, he did this through the Gandhian mode of walking across the length and breadth of India and engaging in dialogue with ordinary people who voluntarily agreed to donate land to the landless in their own neighbourhood and villages

17. More about the American Indian Law Alliance is available in the website -<https://aila.ngo/>
18. The Doctrine of Discovery established a political, legal and spiritual justification for seizure of land from the natives from anywhere for the European travellers in the 15th century. More about the same available here <https://upstanderproject.org/firstlight/doctrine> and a detailed dialogue between India and Native American leaders by Ramasubramanian is available online here <https://samanvayanewsroom.blogspot.com/2019/05/indian-indian-dialogue-when-indians-meet.html>
19. <https://utsnyc.edu/>
20. More details about the Fundamental Orders of 1639 available in the website https://www.constitution.org/bcp/fo_1639.htm