Two Paradigms in Interpreting Gandhi

Pratap Kumar
University of Durban-Westville

In the present essay, I shall explore the interpretations of Gandhi by Robert Huttenback (1971) and Maureen Swan (1985). I have selected the two books in view of their contrasting views on Gandhi. While Huttenback's book represents a more orthodox view on Gandhi, Swan's book presents a more critical one. I shall review their interpretations of Gandhi and explore the various implications for interpretive history in general. In doing so, I presuppose that there is no such thing as raw data in dealing with human sciences, unlike in the pure sciences. Things do not happen in isolation. Events are part of people's lives and therefore come to the historian in some sense coloured by what people say about the events. Besides, the historian also comes from a specific historical and cultural milieu from which his/her categories of interpretation are largely derived. Therefore, in approaching the data the historian is subject to, inter alia, at least two things - firstly, to his/her own historical and cultural milieu, and secondly, to the emerging interpretations that already exist among people, (e.g., journalists and politicians). It is the burden of the historian to take this intersubjectivity to the data and negotiate with it in order to see between the lines and explore what might be in his/her view, the actual truth. Since the historian is caught in the intersubjectivity, the data remains elusive to pure objective scrutiny. In other words, both Huttenback and Swan are constructing the picture of Gandhi not in an attempt to find the objective truth, but a truth that has been influenced by people, their own perceptions and power politics. That is to say that we do not have a revealed Gandhi but a Gandhi who lived among people and negotiated his role through the viscissitudes of public life.

In the course of my reviewing of the understanding of Gandhi in Huttenback and Swan, I shall attempt to show where the two of them converge and where they depart, and the underlying assumptions either for their convergence or for their departure from each other's point of view. The key concept in my analysis of the two authors is 'understanding' as understood in hermeneutic discourse.

Huttenback's Gandhi

In the preface to his book[1] Huttenback writes (Huttenback 1971):

> The actual conditions immigrant Indians encountered, however, fell far short of their expectations, and *this book is the story of their struggle for survival in South Africa under the leadership of Gandhi and of how, in the process, he imprinted himself on the country and it on him.* The book is also a study in the dynamics of British imperial administration, of the interrelationship and interaction of the British, the Indian, and the several South African governments catalyzed and focused by an Indian community which was inspired and guided by Gandhi.(Huttenback 1971: viii, emphasis mine)

Huttenback places Gandhi in the context of the 'Indian problem', and he defines the problem and its ramifications at some length. In his assessment of the data, the 'Indian problem' came to surface when the returned Indian labourers reported on the ill-treatment, poor conditions of living, lack of funds, illegal fines, withheld-wages, etc .(Huttenback 1971: 8) Between the 1870s and 1891 the nature of the 'Indian problem' changed, which only worsened the plight of the Indians. By 1891 there were about 41 142 Indians to 46 788 Europeans (Huttenback 1971: 14). The presence of such a significant number of Indians, almost equal to their European counterparts, began to threaten the very existence of the European community in Natal. What complicated the situation was that Indians began to demand equal treatment as British subjects. Huttenback writes:

> The presence of a significant body of Indians permanently resident in Natal became progressively more odious to the majority of white settlers as the number of immigrants grew. And that these undesirables should, upon becoming free, have the same rights as all other British subjects in the colony was particularly galling. (Huttenback 1971: 14)

Huttenback comments that the question of the rights of Indians was seen by whites as something that affected their very security. He suggests that the 'Indian problem' was compounded when the Natal made the decision to withhold land grants to Indians after 1891. Law 25 of 1891 further prevented the Indians from leaving Natal before the completion of ten years of residence. Huttenback summarizes the Indian problem under four points:

> It was in 1893, and the white settlers were united on four points vis-a-vis their Indian neighbours. They agreed that Indian labourers should no longer be permitted to remain in Natal at the conclusion of their contracts. They were determined to prevent Indians from voting. And they sought to impede the future immigration of free Indians, as well as licensing of Indians to conduct business in Natal. (Huttenback 1971: 45)

It is against this background that Gandhi's arrival in 1893 is situated. I re-read Huttenback after reading Swan, and I felt that Huttenback does not emphasize the last two points as much as Swan does in her treatment of Gandhi. Huttenback seems to place all four points on an equal footing and deals with them as one 'Indian problem' rather than making the fine distinction between the first two more immediately related to the Indentured labourers and the last two more immediately related to the emerging "commercial elite." I shall elaborate on the 'Indian problem' after I have dealt with Swan's book as well.

Huttenback further states that a delegation went from Natal to India to stop the indenture system completely. The delegation failed in its main objective, but managed to get a legislation passed whereby a three pound annual tax was imposed "on formerly indentured Indians who would not return to their native land at the conclusion of their contracts." (Huttenback 1971: 45). While on the one hand Huttenback sees the annual poll tax of three pounds per person radically affecting the very existence of the indentured labourers, he does not delve into the question as to on which basis the annual tax on each Indian person was calculated. In other words, Huttenback does not explore whether it was based on the income of the indentured labourers or on the income of the 'commercial elite.' However, he does emphasize that for an indentured family whose income was no more than sixteen pounds per annum, the three pound tax had eliminated any economic prospects for the indentured people, let alone the political opportunities, such as the possibility of voting. The poll tax obviously did not affect the 'commercial elite' as it did the indentured. In this way, Huttenback gives the impression that poll tax was more a problem for the indentured labourers than the 'commercial elite.' The natural implication of the argument is that Gandhi fought for the indentured labourers from the time of his arrival.

Right from the start Huttenback describes Gandhi as a "moralist and ideologue" (Huttenback 1971: 47). By 1894 Gandhi was leading Indians in Natal in opposing the whites on the question of "Indian franchise." (Huttenback 1971: 50) Nevertheless, Huttenback makes no mistake in pointing out that the very first response of Gandhi was a specific one to a newspaper (Natal Advertiser) on the question of Indian traders. His second response was a general one

on the question of 'Indian franchise.' (Huttenback 1971: 49)

By 1896, the 'Indian problem' was clearly revolving around the so-called "free passengers." When Gandhi returned from India in 1896 after his brief stay there, the two ships 'Courtland' and 'Naderi', both leaving from Bombay, brought 'free passengers' (traders from Gujarat). In fact, the 'free passengers' began arriving from the beginning of the 1870s. The then prime minister of Natal, Sir John Robinson, was trying to persuade the government not to send 'free passengers' to Natal (Huttenback 1971: 60). By this time a distinction was made between two kinds of Indians in Natal, namely the indentured Indians, and the free Indians. Obviously the Natal government did not have much of a problem with the indentured Indians, but rather with the 'free passenger' Indians. Huttenback points out:

> Indentured Indians were the particular responsibility of the Indian Government, and the Natal authorities were most careful to avoid a confrontation that would endanger the vital supply of Indian labour. The "Arabs," on the other hand, came to Natal of their own volition, and were not covered by most of the protective legislation passed on behalf of the indentured Indians in India and Natal. The colonial government had therefore only to keep in mind the general imperial responsibility of the Colonial Office in moving against them. (Huttenback 1971: 63)

In spite of the fact that the Natal government made a distinction between the indentured labourers and the free passenger Indians, Act 14 of 1897 uniformly applied to Indians in general. Under the above-mentioned act, all Indians became ineligible to enter Natal. In other words, on the one hand the Natal government wanted security for the economic interests of the Europeans and were willing to let the indentured Indians enter the colony because they were the main source of labour for the white farmers. On the other, the British government in India wanted to deal with all British subjects i.e., Europeans and Indians, as equals. Act 14 of 1897 therefore had to be drafted in such a way that it would not look like it was racially biased. And they managed to do so by introducing two dubious pre-requisites, viz., ownership of property to the value of twenty five pounds, and knowledge of a European language (Huttenback 1971: 63). Huttenback adds in his footnote that the property qualification was not as strictly demanded as that of language (Huttenback 1971: 63, see footnotes 42 and 43). Whatever the ostensible language of Act 14 was, the Natal government had no doubt, whatsoever, who the Act was directed at. As the then Prime Minister of Natal rightly admitted in the legislature, "The object of the bill is to deal with Asiatic immigrants" (Huttenback 1971: 64). The fran-

chise law of 1894 also treated all Indians alike (without any distinctions between indentured Indians and 'free passenger' Indians). But it is Act 18 of 1897 which seems more clearly directed against the traders. Under the provisions of this act the Natal municipalities could deny licenses to the Indian traders through indirect means such as delaying, or simply ignoring the application. Again Huttenback points out that the act did not deliberately target the indentured Indians who became free after their term. He points out:

> The indentured Indians and free Indians already established in Natal, they [the government authorities in India] claimed, were their main responsibility. If the proposed law were only to affect new arrivals, they would after all be entering the situation with their eyes open. (Huttenback 1971: 79, parenthesis mine)

Thus, on the one hand there was some concern frequently expressed by the Indian Government regarding the welfare of the indentured Indians, but on the other hand they could not in the end avoid the inevitable, namely, that all three acts (the Immigration Act, the Franchise Act, and the Licensing Act) in one way or another cumulatively affected all Indians. Thus Huttenback leads his reader to the point where all Indians and not just the 'commercial elite' were affected one way or another. And it is in the context of the plight of all Indians that Gandhi's second arrival in Natal is seen. In the view of Huttenback, Gandhi most certainly viewed the situation in Natal as a common Indian problem, as opposed to something exclusively related to the 'commercial elite.' Huttenback points out,

> Gandhi was also becoming convinced that the Natal authorities were determined to drive *all the Indians* in the colony back to India, to deprive Indians of their rights as British subjects. (Huttenback 1971: 81, emphasis mine).

It would be erroneous to assume that it is Huttenback who presents the "Indian Problem" as affecting all Indians, although at some level it did seem to have affected all Indians, but I think it would be fair to take Huttenback's point that he is in fact presenting the problem as Gandhi himself saw it. In other words, Huttenback is conscious of the fact that he is dealing with Gandhi's experience in South Africa, rather than with the Indian experience in South Africa at the time of Gandhi. There is a distinction between the two points. Thus, insofar as Gandhi is his focus for understanding the South African Indian situation, Huttenback is approaching the subject as Gandhi saw it. And in Gandhi's mind there seems to be no doubt that it was a common Indian problem, as opposed to the problem of "free passengers" who entered South Africa to trade. In fact, in

his own writings, Ghandi made no distinction between the indentured labourers and the 'free passenger' traders. He simply overlooks that distinction when he says, referring to the three pound tax:

> The white traders were alarmed. When they first welcomed the Indian labourers, they had not reckoned with their business skill. They might be tolerated as independent agriculturists, but their competition in trade could not be brooked. (Narayan, n.d. : 231)

Gandhi furthermore tries to impress upon his readers that he wanted to come closer not only to the Muslims but also to the Tamils. Recounting his journey to India in 1896, Gandhi says, "My experience in Natal had shown me that I should acquire a knowledge of Urdu to get into closer contact with the Musalmans, and of Tamil to get into closer touch with the Madras Indians" (Narayan, n.d.: 246). Gandhi presents the case of South African Indians to the Indian National Congress in India as one single problem and not as though it is the problem of the 'commercial elite.' Whether Gandhi was presenting the facts correctly to his readers is another issue. But what seems clear is that insofar as Huttenback has chosen to highlight Gandhi's experience in South Africa, he seems to follow closely how Gandhi and his followers later depicted it. In other words, Huttenback seems to be already influenced by the picture that emerged both in Gandhi's own autobiography and also in the hagiographical accounts that appeared after Gandhi's death. Thus Huttenback saw the experience of Indians primarily through the eyes of Gandhi, and even when he makes important distinctions between the indentured labourers and the 'free passengers' he does not pursue the internal ramifications of the various Acts in the way in which they affected the differentiated groupings within the Indian community.

Although Huttenback states clearly that when the problem spread to Transvaal it was the traders who became the targets of Act 3 of 1885,[2] he treats it as a problem related to all Indians. Referring to the case that a Muslim trader lost in 1888 when he applied for a license to trade in Middleburg, Huttenback states in very general terms, "The Indians had apparently lost their last hope for success in the struggle to preserve their vested interests in the towns of the Transvaal" (Huttenback 1971: 114). Nevertheless, in a footnote in fine print, he draws the attention of the reader to the point that:

> He [Gandhi] urged the agent to insist that only Indians proved to be living in unsanitary circumstances be removed to locations. He pointed out that there were some 125 British Indian shopkeepers in Johannesburg and its suburbs and 4 000 hawkers. The shopkeepers, Gandhi claimed,

> possessed unliquidated assets of about £375,000 and the hawkers of about £400,000. A forced move to locations would place a heavy and unwarranted financial burden on them. (Huttenback 1971: 115, f.n. 59)

The above note of Huttenback makes clear that Gandhi undoubtedly had his interests with the traders and not so much the indentured labourers, whom he describes as Indians "living in unsanitary circumstances." And the fact that Huttenback does not make this point as part of the main body of his text leads me to think that he indeed wanted to depict a sublimated perception of Gandhi as the "champion." He certainly titled his third chapter as 'The Advent of a Champion.' In the Cape too, Gandhi is depicted as being preoccupied with the Indian question, mainly regarding the issue of licenses to traders. He in fact provoked the Indians there to react to the licensing act. (Huttenback 1971: 217-18) It is needless to pursue this line of approach any further to lay bare the underlying assumptions of Huttenback's approach to Gandhi, because the point is made sufficiently clear that Huttenback indeed tried to present Gandhi in South Africa as Gandhi himself saw it. As he progresses in his book, he sees the 'Indian question' as affecting all Indians, rather than just the traders. This does not mean that Huttenback was historically inaccurate, but rather, that he chose to emphasize certain aspects and understated other aspects that are considered vital in other analyses, as we will see in M. Swan's treatment of Gandhi.

Maureen Swan's Gandhi

Swan begins her book with Gandhi's constituents rather than Gandhi himself. She identifies three constituents among Indians in South Africa by the time Gandhi arrived – viz., 1) the commercial elite, 2) the new elite, 3) the underclasses. According to Swan's argument, it is the 'commercial elite' who formed the core of Gandhi's constituency. Although the 'commercial elite' were from Gujarat and included both Hindus and Muslims, she makes no reference to the Hindu component and primarily presents the picture of a Muslim community. She tries to establish the relative affluence of the merchants, whose average annual income was 300 pounds, compared with the 12 to 18 pounds which was the average income for the indentured labourers (Swan 1985: 9). A logical implication of this argument of showing the relative affluence of the merchants is that the 3 pound tax did not affect the merchants as it did the indentured labourers. It is precisely on this basis that Huttenback sees Gandhi representing the plight of the indentured labourers. Huttenback sees Gandhi's involvement in South Africa against the background of not only what happened in the immediately preceding years, but against the background of the history of the indentured labourers in Natal. That is, he begins his analysis from the 1860s.

On the other hand, Swan begins her analysis from 1885, when the merchant elite activity began. Although she points out the disparity in the incomes of the merchants and the indentured Indians, she does not push the point to its logical implication which, in fact, would make it appear that Gandhi's concern was indeed the indentured labourers. Swan rather quickly moves to the merchant elite problems developing in the Orange Free State and the Transvaal, where the Indian merchants were required to register with the magistrate (Swan 1985: 38-39). She points out that in September 1890 the Indians were prohibited from owning land. In December of the same year, the Natal draft constitution also did not provide any safeguards for the Indian merchants. In January 1891 the Indian merchants, in an effort to salvage their interests in the Orange Free State and the Transvaal and at the same time to prevent a similar legislation in Natal, made petitions to the India Office, the Colonial Office, the Natal Secretary's Office and the Office of the Protector of Immigrants in Natal. In 1892, a printed pamphlet containing the grievances of the merchants was sent to all the different offices, and in June 1893 a second pamphlet, dealing exclusively with the problems of the merchants in the Orange Free State was sent to the Colonial Office (Swan 1985: 41-43). It is against this background of merchant problems that Swan sees Gandhi's arrival in South Africa. She further indicates that the situation of the merchants and their need to have someone to help in the organizational work etc., was conducive to a person like Gandhi to enter and take over the responsibility of leading the merchants in their struggle. She elaborates:

> One or two minor aspects of pre-Gandhian politics are also noteworthy. During the course of the first political campaign the necessity of being able to delegate responsibility became apparent. An important memorial to the Colonial Office was held up for months because Haji Dada was ill and unable to deal with it. Dada Abdullah, engaged in a £40 000 lawsuit against an Indian merchant in the Transvaal, was also preoccupied with other matters. Yet, given the lack of an organizational structure, there was no-one besides these two capable of carrying on the campaign. Also, since so much of the elite's political activity was based on interpretations of the law, the need for legal counsel was constant. Since few of the merchants spoke English, the advantage of a lawyer who was fluent in both Gujerati and English requires no emphasis. These facts go far towards explaining the way in which Gandhi was particularly suited to elite political needs. (Swan 1985: 43)

Although this is a plausible reconstruction of the events, it is certainly based on retrospection, because we have no evidence to show that Gandhi's employer, Dada Abdulla, had any such long-range plans for Gandhi. Gandhi was hired by Dada Abdulla only to deal with the lawsuit. Supposing Gandhi had dealt only with the legal case and went back to India, would the above conjecture of Swan be plausible despite the fact that there was a need for some educated person to help the merchants? It would be an erroneous way of interpreting facts if we were to over-emphasize the readiness of the situation for Gandhi, instead of also taking into account the initiative of Gandhi. In other words, if Gandhi did not take the initiative, all the 'readiness' of the situation which was conducive for his involvement would have made no difference. But historians seldom ask the 'what if' question. One might answer it by replying that someone else would have done it. In other words, history would have required someone to take the initiative. And we may return to the hypothetical question again: 'What if' no one took the initiative? This could lead to an infinite regress. That is to say, maybe somebody else would have taken the initiative, but Gandhi would not have become the kind of person that people identified him as. In this sense, historical events and people cannot be radically separated, as though the events would have taken place regardless of the people who became involved. If we argue that even if Gandhi did not do it somebody else would have done it, then we would be making an artificial disjunction and discontinuity between the person and the event. The point that I am trying to make is that, in their interpretations, historians must stay as close as they can to the basic facts and guard against reading too much between the lines. A safer method would be to point out both sides of the fact, namely, that things were conducive and it so happened that Gandhi took the correct initiative. Thus, what made the difference was that Gandhi took the initiative to plunge himself into the politics of the merchants. In interpreting historical events, historians must be acutely aware of the pitfalls of the questions, so that our enthusiasm to make a point does not result in some kind of distortion of the facts. The notion of 'if' in history is discussed by Giddens in his book *The Constitution of Society*. (Giddens, 1984).

In pointing out the merchant politics, Swan notes that "the South African government had demonstrated their intention to express a generalized anti-Indian hostility in discriminatory legislation". She goes on to say - "Yet no significant white counterweight to any of the anti-Indian lobbies was organized" (Swan 1985: 44). This point is corroborated by Huttenback's account. Huttenback points out that the Transvaal Traders Defense Association of Johannesburg, a white lobby, presented a strong petition to remove the so-called "Arabs" to separate locations (Huttenback 1971: 116-17). However, Swan does not seem to think that these developments in Transvaal and elsewhere could have had notable repercussions in Natal as well which, it seems to me, was the case, given the fact that the Indian merchants saw the developments in Orange Free State,

Transvaal and Natal as "part of a larger pattern" as Swan herself states elsewhere (Swan 1985: 40). Furthermore, Swan's point about the merchant elite fighting against "racial discrimination" and at the same time distinguishing themselves from the "underclasses" is somewhat confusing (Swan 1985: 44). It is true that the merchant elite tended to claim racial equality by distancing themselves from the "underclasses" because they thought they were discriminated against on the basis of their being Indians and therefore, non-whites. But the question is that if they fought "racial discrimination", why would they distinguish themselves from the other Indians? In other words, the important point here is that they were not "fighting" racial discrimination *per se* but rather trying to escape from such discrimination through some kind of 'backdoor' tactic. The other point that Swan fails to clarify in this regard is as to how it would have helped the merchant elite in their politics against white economic supremacy. White economic interests were directly affected by the merchant elite themselves and not by indentured labourers. And in fact, Huttenback notes time and again that the indentured labourers were seen as an advantage to the white man's farming interests. So if the merchant elite were directly responsible for their plight, how would it have helped them if they distanced themselves from the indentured Indians? Two points must be clarified here: 1) At one level the merchant elite, by artificially distancing themselves from the underclasses, tried to escape the discrimination (by claiming higher social status); 2) at another level, by incorporating the grievances of the underclasses in their petitions to the government of India, they sought to enlist the former's support in order to achieve their own commercial interests. This second point is made clear by Swan but not the first one.

Nevertheless, while linking Gandhi in this whole scenario Swan rightly points out that he *did* underscore the interests of the commercial elite when he represented the struggle of the Indians in South Africa. She points out that Gandhi argued the case of Indians on three grounds: 1) They (Indians) were equal subjects of the Crown, 2) they were desirable citizens, and 3) they did not have any political goals (Swan 1985: 63). All these points, when read against the statement that he (Gandhi) made elsewhere, would reveal the commercial interests of the merchants rather than the interests of the indentured labourers. "'There would have been no franchise agitation', Gandhi claimed, 'had not an attempt been made to tread upon their commercial pursuits'" (Swan 1985: 63). Thus Swan sees Gandhi's involvement in South Africa primarily as protecting the interests of the commercial elite. While this central thesis of Swan is credible, she is occasionally seen forcing the data, to make that one single point. The fact that her point of departure is 1885, when the merchant Indians were establishing themselves in different parts of South Africa, betrays her keenness to make the point. Besides, by presenting the merchant elite as being exclusively Muslim, her analysis disregards the Hindu component. As for Huttenback,

while Swan makes reference to the Africans and Chinese in *her* analysis, he totally disregards the role of these two communities during this period. He even says, that "the whole drama was to be played out without any reference to the silent and essentially unnoticed majority of the population, the Africans - who in 1911 accounted for more than 82 percent of the total population of South Africa" (Huttenback 1971: 43). And in contrast to this Swan does note that the African and Coloured communities were already politicized by this time.[3] She also points out that despite the fact that the Africans and the Coloured were politically motivated, Gandhi neither joined them nor sought their support. And by not joining hands with them, Swan says, "Gandhi facilitated the implementation of the divisive segregationist policies which helped ease the task of white minority rule in South Africa." (Swan 1985: 112).

General Remarks

As a historian of religions I have come to appreciate not only the meaning and interpretation of events in synchronic order, but also in diachronic order. The events and the people involved in those events are given meaning and significance by the larger public over a period of time, and those meanings are preserved and perpetuated by people through time. Therefore, the question is not only whether the historian can be free from the prevailing meaning and interpretation given to the events and the people, but also whether they *should* be free from such interpretations. In other words, is it possible to construct an understanding of Gandhi without taking into account how people saw him? As a matter of fact, both Huttenback and Swan seem to be guided by the perceptions and interpretations that were already in vogue. It so happens that Huttenback chose to pursue the more popular interpretation of Gandhi while Swan chose to pursue a rather unpopular interpretation—the one that exists among some members of the Indian community.

In our attempt to reconstruct the life of Gandhi in South Africa, we need to take into account the analyses of both Huttenback and Swan, for each one provides what is missing in the other. But the way the two historians approached Gandhi and the events surrounding him raises some important issues for interpretive history in general. Therefore, in conclusion I shall make some general remarks on historiography with specific reference to Gandhi.

Looking at the approaches of both Huttenback and Swan, as a historian of religions, I am particularly drawn by the values, ideologies and worldviews that often shape the interpretation of a given phenomenon. In understanding Gandhi, one of the things we need to consider is why Gandhi is cast in the 'Great Soul' (Mahatma) mould and not as a great national hero or some such category. Every nation finds place in its history for some extraordinary people who made history for its people. But not all nations and their cultures judge those extraor-

dinary people from the same value system. The values, ideologies, and worldviews of those people provide them with the kind of categories which become useful in providing coherence in their effort to integrate such personalities into their understanding of reality around them. Indian culture provides within both the empirical realm and the spiritual realm, a place for animals, humans, nature, super-humans, gods, and so on. When people are seen as human they are placed on par with all other people. But when someone is seen as extraordinary, such person is either deified, or elevated to the level of the Divinity. Such person is seen as participating in the higher forms of life which reflect the Divinity more than humanity. Both ordinary and extraordinary people in that sense are placed on a hierarchy that is continuous and not radically separable. It is this hierarchical way of thinking that allows Indian culture to integrate people like Gandhi effectively into one system that is coherent. In other words, somehow people must see everything as part of a total worldview and not outside of it. In that sense Gandhi, even if he is placed in the mould of the 'Great Soul', forms part of the total consciousness of people. The hagiographers, in fact, reflect such integration of Gandhi into their consciousness. By the time Huttenback and other historians got to the data, Gandhi was already elevated to something of a unique kind. Insofar as Gandhi becomes central to those events, it is hardly possible for historians to overcome the dominant perceptions of people. Huttenback falls into the category of historiographers who are bound by tradition and give meaning to the data within the boundaries of tradition. Gadamer, in his *Theory and Method*, affirms that interpretation is never possible outside the bounds of tradition (Gadamer 1979). However, social theoreticians such as Habermas (1990: 245-272) tend to argue that it is possible to critique tradition by stepping out of it and by bringing in aspects that tradition does not take into account. In that sense, what Swan was doing was precisely that, namely, to problematize the traditional interpretation by focusing on the economic factors that were ignored by traditional interpreters. But although Swan problematizes the traditional interpretation by standing outside of it, insodoing she produces a counter-tradition which in turn becomes part of the consciousness of people. When I was in South Africa briefly in October 1990, I had an interesting conversation with a Tamil-speaking Indian journalist in Durban. At that point I was not aware of Swan's book. The journalist spoke extensively on how Gandhi sided with the 'free passenger' Indian (by which he meant the Gujaratis). Thus Swan's interpretation reflects a counter-tradition. It is also possible that the interpretation that Swan's book presents could have been assimilated by people. But that would be to suggest that Swan has forced her theory on the data. I am inclined to suggest that Swan's interpretation could have been in vogue amongst a section of the community and Swan teased it out to present an alternative perspective. And one has to see the two perspectives as parts of a cumulative tradition that seems to have two divergent aspects but form part of

the total picture. In that sense, Swan's interpretation, which seeks to critique the orthodox tradition, is integral to the total understanding of Gandhi. In other words, Swan's critique of tradition forms part of an on-going cumulative tradition. This means that we return to a kind of hermeneutic circle which Gadamer points out as a mode of interpretation which expands as new dimensions are brought to light from time to time. Thus, a critical understanding of Gandhi includes both the Mahatma and the elite representative of the merchants, viz., the politician. Whether the 'Mahatma' image is tarnished by the other image of a representative of the merchant elite is a different question. But a fuller understanding of Gandhi must incorporate both dimensions. The various conflicting images forming one single tradition is nothing unlike the Indian tradition. Otherwise, one wonders how so many conflicting philosophical claims can still be seen as part of a bigger tradition that we call Hindu tradition.

Notes

1 In quoting from Huttenback where necessary, I have modified his American spellings in order to conform to the British spellings which I have used in the entire text. Thus for instance, words, such as 'labor' in Huttenback are spelled in my text as 'labor.'

2 The act in question prevented Indian traders from doing their business except in those places that are designated to them. And the basis of designating separate locations for them was on the grounds of the bad hygienic conditions in which they lived.

3 For a fuller account of the African struggle see R & J Simons (1938) and Roux (1978).

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