

PART 13: CONCLUSIONS

By Upendra Baxi

By way of concluding the inconcludable, we need to return to Mahatma Gandhi. Human rights educators need to recall his insight that challenged the very foundations of liberal “Western” economic theory.

Human wants are infinite, and the resources servicing these are finite. Instead, human needs and wants must be moderated to become finite so that available resources then may become infinite.

Mahatma Gandhi

In the contemporary United Nations rhetoric, this notion is poorly represented in the languages of sustainable development.

Human rights activism and education face formidable challenges. In the face of a globalized middle class consumer ideology, the Gandhian truth needs to be revived that insists on individual sovereign agency which limits the triumphant march of global capitalism. Simple living and high thinking was the Mahatma motto, now wholly reversed by the gurus and pundits of globalization. HRE practices need now to revert the current truths of high living and simple thinking. There are no easy ways to accomplish this. That is why we call HRE an exercise in *difficult freedom*, the art of the impossible confronting politics as the art of the possible, the ‘practice of Resistance in its absolute sense.

Put another way, we affirm (in the evocative words of Robin West) that: *The test of the morality of power in public life as in private life may be neither compliance with community mores ... nor political success ... but love.* And the mission of HRE, we say, is best grounded *not in abstract reason, nor in general truths, nor in the dictates of pre-existing law, nor in naked power, but rather in sympathetic judgments of the heart.* HRE thus suggests the celebration of the *habits of the heart* (to invoke Robert Bellah’s fecund notion) and maintains the antisystemic people’s struggle to recover their own futures. If it is to exist at all, HRE must reverberate to an Eliotian mood:

*The daring of a moment’s surrender
Which no age of prudence may retrieve
By this, and this alone, we live.*

This may be severely faulted, if only because romanticism, at the end of the day, may defer utopia while producing dystopia. We have referred many a time to the ways in which the politics of human rights often leave people worse off in ways that can make them believe they have nothing to lose but the binding chains of human rights. In certain times and places, the invocation of human rights can aggravate rather than ameliorate their human condition and circumstances.

All this, in turn, entails a considerable burden of reflexive labor on human rights activists and educational communities.

POLITICS IS HARDER THAN PHYSICS

Albert Einstein

Our Report, we hope, makes a small, though impassioned, contribution to this millennial task, which forever remains defined through the idiom of the Mahatma Gandhi's notion of the *Swaraj*: radical agency and autonomy, the human capability to exercise freedom in non-threatening ways to the Other. In a reciprocally enriching insight, sage Emmanuel Levinas also defines the meaning of *difficult freedom* in terms of the non-negotiable extraordinary relation between a human being and his or her neighbor, one that continues to exist even when it is severely damaged. Of course, we have the power to relate ourselves to the Other as to an object, to repress and exploit him or her. However, the relation to the Other, as a relation of responsibility, cannot be totally suppressed, even when it takes the form of politics or warfare. It is impossible to free myself by saying, "It's not my concern." There is no choice, for it is always, and inescapably, my concern.

Authentic HRE thrives best when it lights candles, not when it curses darkness. It must, in order to exist, signify the triumph of the ethics and philosophies of human hope over the turgid experience of power politics.