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Editorial

INDIA HAS ENTERED its 75th year of freedom and celebrations are being organized by the government and the civil organisations across the country. It is an occasion to remember the thousands of freedom fighters, both men and women, and their sacrifices and suffering for the cause of independence. Our polity has stood the test of time despite many setbacks. This is a matter of consolation for all Indians. Many countries that became free around the same time are struggling to demonstrate their democratic credentials. Our hard-won freedom needs to be protected and sustained from attacks by powerful forces in society and the state. In the process of overcoming his own fear and weakness, Gandhi reassured Indians that they need not fear the colonisers. India's freedom was equally reassuring to the rest of the colonial world, particularly the African countries. Since obtaining freedom, India has been a staunch supporter of all decolonisation movements.

One of the major challenges to our democracy came during the period of emergency. We have come a long way from that dark chapter in our history. Democracy is a project in the making and is not a one-shot phenomenon. The quality of our democracy has suffered. Many political parties are personality-oriented rather than programmatic in nature. Many of them thrive by garnering votes through polarisation centred around particularistic loyalties. Remnants of dynastic politics continue in the country. Wendell Phillips, the American abolitionist said, 'eternal vigilance is the price of liberty'. It means that our freedom has to be zealously guarded from encroachments of any kind and alertness to such moves become the duty of a citizen.

Freedom brought hope to millions of Indians. Many thought it would usher in an era in which social and economic inequalities would disappear and a certain level of social well-being would be made available to all. We adopted an insular economic policy initially aimed at self-reliance to be replaced by a liberal one in the nineties. We have made strides in several areas, but remain entrapped in many other

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fields from which we are still struggling to get free. While liberalisation ensured growth in several sectors, the benefits of growth have not percolated down to the ordinary people.

India is now the most heterogeneous country in the world, and has remained so this far is a testament to the vision of the founders who envisaged a polity where one's religion, caste, region and language would not stand in the way of one's identification with the nation and one's progress. Although attacks have been launched against this feature of our polity, it is this very diversity that makes India a marvel to the rest of the world.

There is a nexus between crime and politics. There is an overcentralisation of power by some leaders. Indian federalism, despite the rhetoric on cooperative federalism, is under severe strain. Institutions are found to be wanting in their ability to check executive excesses. There has also been a turn towards majoritarianism in Indian politics. A sort of informal consociationalism or power-sharing, which used to be a feature of our polity, has also suffered damage in recent times.

When we celebrated the 50 years of our independence, there was a discussion of the difference between Bharat and India, with the middle and techno-savvy classes identifying themselves with modern India, and large mass of people representing the ordinary citizens for whom freedom has not meant redemption identifying themselves with Bharat. This chasm between the two notions of India seemed to have only widened in the era of market economy.

Ultimately, more than the abstract symbols associated with patriotism and nationalism, we need to love our fellow Indians. In a hierarchically laden society, every Indian relates to every other in hierarchical terms, in terms of high and low. We should gradually pull down such structures and let ordinary Indians develop a stake in the country as rightful citizens. In these times of COVID-19, our ability to reach out to the less privileged members of the society is the real test of patriotism.

This issue of the journal carries the backlog of the section on Gardens of God from the earlier issue, and two off-theme articles, a shorter article in the notes and comments section and a book review. I thank Ananta Kumar Giri of Madras Institute of Development Studies for the short introduction to the special section.

JOHN S. MOOLAKKATTU
Chief Editor

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Gardens of God: An Introduction to the Special Section

Ananta Kumar Giri

THIS SPECIAL SECTION continues our journey with this theme from the last issue of *Gandhi Marg*. It begins with Christian Bartolf's essay, "Thoreau's "Lakes of Light", Tolstoy's "Kingdom of God" and Gandhi's "Ramarajya." In his essay, Bartolf presents utopian visions of Thoreau, Tolstoy, Gandhi and King to understand the vision and practice of Gardens of God. Bartolf discusses Thoreau's stay and work near Walden, the pond near Concord, Massachusetts. He discusses Tolstoy's vision and practice of Kingdom of God at the core of which is the practice of love and non-violence. He then discusses Gandhi's vision of Ramrajya which builds upon both Thoreau and Tolstoy. Critical self-introspection, respect for all and taking self-control of oneself as well as helping others to have self-control are at the core of Gandhi's vision of Ram Rajya. Bartolf then discusses Martin Luther King's vision and realization of Kingdom of God as realization of the Beloved Community in self, society and the world.

Bartolf's essay is followed by Richard Hartz's essay, "From Eden to Vrindavan: Exploring the Political Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo," in which Hartz discusses the political philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and its implication for rethinking Gardens of God. Taking into account the heights to which human beings can rise as well as the depths to which they can sink, his approach often converges with the political thinking of others in both East and West who acknowledge our capacity for self-transcendence, such as Reinhold Niebuhr and the New Confucianists. From this point of view, political systems are best understood and assessed according to the opportunities they provide

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for human growth. Humanity progresses, individually and collectively, from infra-rational beginnings through a long stage of rational development toward a supra-rational fulfillment foreshadowed prophetically in many of the world's religions. Drawing on Judeo-Christian and Indian mythologies, this growth could be described as an evolution that began in the carefree Eden of a pre-rational existence. Exiled from that unreflective paradise by the emergence of the thinking mind, human life proceeds through various attempts at a rational ordering of society toward its eventual culmination in a kind of spiritual anarchism when politics has served its purpose. To symbolize that consummation, Sri Aurobindo often uses imagery associated with another "garden of God," the groves of Vrindavan where Krishna's sports embody the play of divine delight in this world.

Hartz's essay is followed by Muhammad Maroof Shah's essay, "This Very Garden is the Garden of Eden: Participating with Wittgenstein and Mystical Philosophers in Heaven Here and Now." Pursuit of eudomonia or peace that passeth all understanding or a land of no sorrow or repose of being or the silence that drown all existential fever is what has been the overriding theme of human odyssey. The world is a vale of soul making as Keats noted and we can be sustained in our hard struggle to live by virtue of glimpsing higher horizons or deeper depths of heart. This far off horizon which, however, colours all our endeavours, may be called Heaven. The task of philosophy, poetry and mysticism is to make this more accessible. Heaven is a space to be nurtured or cultivated and very few succeed in the task. Every small act of gratitude and love and attention to beauty is nurturing this space. Whether one is religious or secular, grace is available though we may not be able to receive it. Shah tells us how challenging it is to feel this when one strolls in one's garden. Philosophers like Wittgenstein open us to the wonder of being and make it possible to appreciate heavenly dimension of ordinary life.

Shah's essay is followed by Felix Padel and Malvika Gupta's essay, "Faultlines in Paradise: Indigenous People and Conservation Areas." Padel and Gupta tell us how it can be illusive to look at the beautiful habitats where indigenous people of the world live as paradise, but these are being taken away by both forces of industry and conservation, destroying both biodiversity and cultural diversity. These forces of destruction create faultlines in paradise. Padel and Gupta critique one-sided industrialization and conservation and plead for dialogues with the indigenous people for both industries and conservation. Building of conservation parks such as wild life sanctuaries strive to conserve wild life and bio-diversity but evict the indigenous people inhabiting the land. This is not sustainable. To build

Gardens of God here calls for a middle ground of conservation of both Nature and people, wild life and people. For cultivating Gardens of God in self, culture and society, Padel and Gupta urge us to “relearn a sense of sacredness in nature characteristic of indigenous societies.” They also write: “Can we begin to transcend our violent human past to start to understand *How Forests Think*? Many indigenous peoples understand non-human species as relatives, through myth and ritual. Can we conceive of Nature’s surviving wild places no longer in terms of gated compounds, but as Gardens of God in a far more expansive sense, in basic harmony with the perceptions and needs of today’s surviving Indigenous Peoples?”

I hope the above papers help us in rethinking existing conceptions of God, self, religion, society, politics and spirituality. They also prompt us to cultivate manifold pathways of transformations—self, religious, political, economic and spiritual—for cultivating Gardens of God in our world.

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Paradise of Conscience: Thoreau’s “Lakes of Light”, Tolstoy’s “Kingdom of God” and Gandhi’s “Ramrajya”

Christian Bartolf

ABSTRACT

This essay’s topic is the utopian vision of an ecologically sound, peaceful and just society in the works of Thoreau, Tolstoy and Gandhi. Starting with Thoreau’s beautiful “Lakes of Light” beacons to renew the revolutionary element in his democracy for the emancipation of the downtrodden, suppressed from slavery or even “semi-slavery” (Gandhi), we face the “Kingdom of God is Within You” as rediscovery of humanist ethics and the individual’s moral conscience as soul force through “careful observation” (Greek: παρατηρήσεως - paratērēseōs, according to the gospel of Luke) of the inner voice. Gandhi expanded this vision of emancipation from slavery, violence and war by referring to the Ramayana in his concept of a federation of village republics (gram swarajya) caring for the weakest, a model for a new political world republic (Ramarajya).

Key words: Thoreau, Emerson, Tolstoy, Ramarajya, Garden of Eden

Introduction

IN THE WORKS of our four modern prophets of nonviolent resistance - Thoreau, Tolstoy, Gandhi and King - you find utopian visions of a just and peaceful society, ecologically sound and ethically good, and – in addition – concepts of a paradise on earth, “gardens of god”, but all these visions reflect the transformed soul of human beings who bethink themselves and listen to their voices of conscience. When Dr

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Martin Luther King Jr., the U.S. American prophet of nonviolence of the twentieth century, recalls his “Beloved Community” in a “World House”, he is fully aware and “cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states” as he explained in his famous “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (April 16, 1963), and when he names “The World House” a chapter of his 1967 book “Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?”, then it is based on his Nobel Peace Prize lecture, delivered at the University of Oslo on December 11, 1964, describing three basic challenges to humanity: 1. “racial injustice” – 2. “poverty” – 3. “war” and “weapons of mass destruction”.

But where did King get his inspiration from and whose writings meant his inspirations? Let us give a brief review, starting with the last “Book of Revelation” from the New Testament and ending with the first of Old Testament and Thora: Genesis.

*The god
Is near, and hard to grasp.
But where there is danger,
A rescuing element grows as well.*

—Friedrich Hölderlin, *Patmos*

This 1803 hymn of the German poet-philosopher Hölderlin refers to the enigma of an absent or at least obscure God in the times of death and distress. But it also refers to the author of the final apocalyptic, revealing or unveiling, vision of the New Testament, John the Apostle on Patmos, in the centre of Christian eschatology: In the end, the New Heaven and Earth, and the New Jerusalem replace the old heaven and old earth, with no more distress, suffering or death and the God dwelling in humanity in New Jerusalem¹: “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” With the God speaking²: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.”

But how does the utopian New Jerusalem look like, “the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God”³:

“Her light *was* like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are *the names* of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three

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gates on the west.

Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal. Then he measured its wall: one hundred *and* forty-four cubits, *according* to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel. The construction of its wall was *of* jasper; and the city *was* pure gold, like clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city *were* adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation *was* jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates *were* twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city *was* pure gold, like transparent glass.”

For Dr Martin Luther King, Jr., this was the vision of a “World House”⁴ based on the principle of Equality and Equal Rights for all human beings. The three dimensions were equal, that is why there would be no more high and low, no more poor and rich, no more up and down, no more first or second, no more hierarchy or pyramid, no more domination and suppression.

And the Book of Revelation concluded with an allusion to the allegorical imagery of the genesis: the River of Life and the Tree of Life appear for the healing of the nations and peoples⁵:

... a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, *was* the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each *tree* yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree *were* for the healing of the nations....

All political theology dealt with the imagery of the Book of Revelations and referred, explicitly and implicitly, to its author, John the Apostle on Patmos, an Aegean Sea island which I visited in the year 1995 to meditate on El Greco’s painting of Christ, the sacrificial “Lamb” sacrificing its blood. And all political theology translated such imagery into the present world replete with imperfection and misery.

Let us recollect the vision of Tolstoy’s, Gandhi’s and King’s chief inspiration, Henry David Thoreau’s description of his ecological and peaceful utopia in the context of this *Parousia* (Greek: παρουσία), the second coming of Christ, which is the core of Christian theology,

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inseparably linked with the apocalypse and the epiphany (Greek: *epipháneia*, “manifestation, striking appearance”)⁶:

“And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.”

We consult the less known or quoted passages of Henry David Thoreau’s 1854 book “Walden; or Life in the Woods”⁷ and start with his vision of the “Lakes of Light” in his chapter on “The Ponds”⁸:

“White Pond and Walden are great crystals on the surface of the earth, Lakes of Light. If they were permanently congealed, and small enough to be clutched, they would, perchance, be carried off by slaves, like precious stones, to adorn the heads of emperors; but being liquid, and ample, and secured to us and our successors forever, we disregard them, and run after the diamond of Koh-i-noor ...”

Koh-i-noor, part of the British Crown Jewels, is one of the largest cut diamonds in the world. And a descriptive passage on the familiar New England landscape transforms into a portrait of a colonialist and imperialist British empire, because this diamond might have well be mined in Kollur Mine, India, during the period of the Kakatiya dynasty, as it was acquired by Delhi Sultan Alauddin Khalji and became part of the Mughal Peacock Throne, before it changed hands and was ceded to Queen Victoria after the British annexation of the Punjab in 1849.

While Thoreau continues to refer to the ponds⁹: “... They are too pure to have a market value; they contain no muck. How much more beautiful than our lives, how much more transparent than our characters, are they! We never learned meanness of them ...” While making his transcendental point in the final sentence of the chapter: “Talk of heaven! ye disgrace earth.”

For Thoreau, his wooden hut at Walden Pond meant much more than a haven of refuge of fugitive slaves, a meeting spot for the abolitionist men and women who joined a coalition against slavery, a nature resort for contemplation, meditation, and retreat. In his own words¹⁰:

A lake is the landscape’s most beautiful and expressive feature. It is earth’s eye; looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature. The fluviatile trees next the shore are the slender eyelashes which fringe it, and the wooded hills and cliffs around are its overhanging brows.

“Nothing so fair, so pure, and at the same time so large, as a lake, perchance, lies on the surface of the earth. Sky water. It needs no

fence. Nations come and go without defiling it. It is a mirror which no stone can crack, whose quicksilver will never wear off, whose gilding Nature continually repairs; no storms, no dust, can dim its surface ever fresh; — a mirror in which all impurity presented to it sinks, swept and dusted by the sun's hazy brush — this the light dust-cloth — which retains no breath that is breathed on it, but sends its own to float as clouds high above its surface, and be reflected in its bosom still."¹¹

Thoreau, influenced by Indian philosophy, considered the ponds' water "as sacred as the Ganges at least"¹². He referred to the originary dwellers, the indigenous American Indians with their pow-wow social meetings¹³:

"My townsmen have all heard the tradition- the oldest people tell me that they heard it in their youth- that anciently the Indians were holding a pow-wow upon a hill here, which rose as high into the heavens as the pond now sinks deep into the earth, and they used much profanity, as the story goes, though this vice is one of which the Indians were never guilty, and while they were thus engaged the hill shook and suddenly sank, and only one old squaw, named Walden, escaped, and from her the pond was named. It has been conjectured that when the hill shook these stones rolled down its side and became the present shore."

And when observing the ice of Walden Pond in winter, Thoreau summarized in his chapter on "The Pond in Winter"¹⁴:

Thus it appears that the sweltering inhabitants of Charleston and New Orleans, of Madras and Bombay and Calcutta, drink at my well. In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the Bhagvat Geeta, since whose composition years of the gods have elapsed, and in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial; and I doubt if that philosophy is not to be referred to a previous state of existence, so remote is its sublimity from our conceptions. I lay down the book and go to my well for water, and lo! there I meet the servant of the Brahmin, priest of Brahma and Vishnu and Indra, who still sits in his temple on the Ganges reading the Vedas, or dwells at the root of a tree with his crust and water jug. I meet his servant come to draw water for his master, and our buckets as it were grate together in the same well. The pure Walden water is mingled with the sacred water of the Ganges.

Who inspired Thoreau to his vision of ecological equilibrium, serenity and tranquillity which he associated with his "Lakes of Light", the humility of a noble soul, the modesty of a temporary dweller upon this earth full of beauty and brilliance and colours and seasons?

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It was his friend Ralph Waldo Emerson, the transcendentalist writer of the well-known essays on “Self-Reliance”, “Spiritual Laws”, “Love”, “Friendship”, “The Over-Soul”, “Character”, “Nature” and “Politics”. In his basic 1841 essay on “The Over-Soul”¹⁵, Emerson emphasizes “... that Unity, that Over-soul, within which every man’s particular being is contained and made one with all other; that common heart, of which all sincere conversation is the worship, to which all right action is submission; that overpowering reality which confutes our tricks and talents, and constrains every one to pass for what he is, and to speak from his character, and not from his tongue, and which evermore tends to pass into our thought and hand, and become wisdom, and virtue, and power, and beauty. We live in succession, in division, in parts, in particles. Meantime within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE. And this deep power in which we exist, and whose beatitude is all accessible to us, is not only self-sufficing and perfect in every hour, but the act of seeing and the thing seen, the seer and the spectacle, the subject and the object, are one. We see the world piece by piece, as the sun, the moon, the animal, the tree; but the whole, of which these are the shining parts, is the soul. Only by the vision of that Wisdom can the horoscope of the ages be read, and by falling back on our better thoughts, by yielding to the spirit of prophecy which is innate in every man, we can know what it saith.”

And in this essay of Emerson, we find the core influence on Leo Tolstoy’s world view in his later years which can be illustrated in the central passage on the human being’s conscience, the “careful observation” of the inner voice (Greek: παρατηρήσεως – paratērēseōs) according to the gospel of Luke¹⁶:

“From within or from behind, a light shines through us upon things and makes us aware that we are nothing, but the light is all. A man is the facade of a temple wherein all wisdom and all good abide. What we commonly call man, the eating, drinking, planting, counting man, does not, as we know him, represent himself, but misrepresents himself. Him we do not respect, but the soul, whose organ he is, would he let it appear through his action, would make our knees bend. When it breathes through his intellect, it is genius; when it breathes through his will, it is virtue; when it flows through his affection, it is love. And the blindness of the intellect begins when it would be something of itself. The weakness of the will begins when the individual would be something of himself. All reform aims in some one particular to let the soul have its way through us; in other words, to engage us to obey. Of this pure nature every man is at some

time sensible. Language cannot paint it with his colors. It is too subtle. It is undefinable, unmeasurable; but we know that it pervades and contains us. We know that all spiritual being is in man ...”

Leo Tolstoy’s 1894 book “The Kingdom of God Is Within You”¹⁷ has been described as a key text for Tolstoy’s non-resistance philosophy, nonviolence, or nonviolent resistance. This book overwhelmed Mahatma Gandhi and left an abiding impression on him according to his autobiography “The Story of My Experiments with Truth” (Part II, Chapter 15), and this book inspired Peter Verigin and the Spirit Wrestlers (Doukhobors) of Russia to collectively burn their weapons in the year 1895 to begin a new era of brotherhood and peace. But what is the concept of this inspiring non-fiction treatise of the Russian Count Leo Tolstoy, the most eminent thinker of his age? The answer lies in the continuation of the book title: “...Christianity Not as a Mystic Religion But as a New Theory of Life”. Tolstoy expounded his doctrine of non-resistance or nonviolent resistance referring to the Quakers, to William Lloyd Garrison’s abolitionist anti-slavery “Declaration of Sentiments of the National Anti-Slavery Convention” (The Liberator, 14 December 1833, Philadelphia), to the Bohemian author Petr Chelčický’s 1443 book on the “Net of Faith” and other truth-witnessing resisters guided by conscience. Tolstoy refers to the concept of “conversion” or “reformation” of heart and mind (Greek: metanoia – μετάνοια), also highlighted by Philo Judaeus of Alexandria: “repentance” in the words of John the Baptist and prophesied by Isaiah: “Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3) and “that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47). In Tolstoy’s words at the end of his book¹⁸:

“The sole meaning of life is to serve humanity by contributing to the establishment of the kingdom of God, which can only be done by the recognition and profession of the truth by every man.

“The kingdom of God cometh not with outward show; neither shall they say, Lo here! or, Lo there!, for behold, the kingdom of God is within you.” (Luke 17:20-21) reminding us at the opening quote of his book (John 8:32): “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” – which means adherence to Truth; ... and reminding us at the second quote of his book (Matthew 10:28): “Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” – which means: Fearlessness and Soul Force.

Tolstoy’s gospel of nonviolence in his ethical programme for a new universal religion condemns military conscription and all war¹⁹:

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“Every war, even the most humanely conducted, with all its ordinary consequences, the destruction of harvests, robberies, the license and debauchery, and the murder with the justifications of its necessity and justice, the exaltation and glorification of military exploits, the worship of the flag, the patriotic sentiments, the feigned solicitude for the wounded, and so on, does more in one year to pervert men’s minds than thousands of robberies, murders, and arsons perpetrated during hundreds of years by individual men under the influence of passion.”

And Tolstoy inspired and supported resisters world-wide, conscientious objectors to military service, anti-militarists and pacifists, who solely relied on their weapon of spirit, not at all on military brute force. He accused landowners, merchants, and government officials during that imperial Czarist age to collaborate with the hypocritical, violent regime to destroy the doctrine of Christ and keep up the armed forces of the State and dogmas of the Church.

Thus, he was excommunicated by the Russian Orthodox Church after criticizing the dogmatic theology, but he remained firm in his speaking truth to the clergy and the worldly power. Tolstoy’s firm insistence on Righteousness and Truth brought him followers all around the globe, among them young barrister-at-law and political advocate Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi in South Africa.

It was Mahatma Gandhi who joined this appeal to the conscience for humanity’s sake with the positive qualities of prince Rama of the Kingdom of Kosala in the Sanskrit epic Ramayana ascribed to Maharishi Valmiki. There are many poetic and narrative prose versions of this epic, now let us just consider Gandhi’s understanding of *Ramarajya* or *Rama-Rajya* (or *Khudai Raj*, or the *Panch*, or: “Kingdom of God on Earth”) as his utopian vision of a just and peaceful society²⁰:

“By *Ramarajya* I do not mean Hindu Raj. I mean by *Ramarajya* Divine Raj, the Kingdom of God. For me Rama and Rahim are one and the same deity. I acknowledge no other God but the one God of Truth and righteousness. Whether the Rama of my imagination ever lived or not on this earth, the ancient ideal of *Ramarajya* is undoubtedly one of true democracy in which the meanest citizen could be sure of swift justice without an elaborate and costly procedure. Even the dog is described by the poet to have received justice under *Ramarajya*.”

It was “sovereignty of the people based on pure moral authority”²¹ which Gandhi kept in his mind, nothing less than the independence of his dream, “the Kingdom of God on earth”²² with respect of all religions²³ - Gandhi emphasized²⁴: “If you want to see God in the form of *Ramarajya*, the first requisite is self-introspection. You have to magnify your own faults a thousand fold and shut your eyes to the

faults of your neighbours. That is the only way to real progress.”

What Gandhi refers here as “self-introspection” is the call of conscience through the “careful observation” of the inner voice (Greek: παρατηρήσεως – paratērēseōs), according to the gospel of Luke.

“*Ramarajya* is certainly an imagery ideal, but it can also be proved that something approximating to it did exist in former times. It is true, however, that at no time in the past were untruth and poverty completely absent and they are not likely to be so at any time in the future.”²⁵

“Satyagraha is an attempt to make the possible real. Truth implies justice. A just administration implies an era of truth or swaraj, dharmaraj, *Ramarajya* or the people’s raj (democracy). Under such a government the ruler would be the protector and friend of his subjects. Between his way of life and that of the poorest of his subjects, there would not be such a gulf as there is today.”²⁶

“*Ramarajya* means rule of the people. A person like Rama would never wish to rule. God calls Himself a servant of his servants.”²⁷ Let us find the most precise description in detail of Rama Rajya in the words of Mahatma Gandhi. We find this real socialist utopia of “economic equality”, of honesty, nonviolence and truth, in *The Hindu* (12 June 1945)²⁸:

“Now for Ram Rajya. It can be religiously translated as Kingdom of God on Earth; politically translated, it is perfect democracy in which inequalities based on possession and non-possession, colour, race, or creed or sex vanish; in it, land and State belong to the people, justice is prompt, perfect and cheap and, therefore, there is freedom of worship, speech and the Press – all this because of the reign of the self-imposed law of moral restraint. Such a State must be based on truth and non-violence and must consist of prosperous, happy and self-contained villages and village communities. It is a dream that may never be realized. I find happiness in living in that dreamland, ever trying to realize it in the quickest way.”

Mahatma Gandhi associated his concept of *Ramarajya* with “dharmaraj”, “people’s raj”, democracy, and his vision followed the wisdom of Laozi in his Tao-Te-King, because the rulers become servants of the people, there is no more high and low, no more poor and rich any longer – a role model for the world, a federation of nonviolent administrative entities with no more injustice or war, instead: social justice and peace between all nations.

The images he used for his utopian vision of “enlightened anarchy”, of real “Independence”²⁹ were ever widening oceanic circles and the end of hierarchical pyramids: “Independence must begin at the bottom. Thus, every village will be a Republic or Panchayat having full powers.

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It follows, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world. It will be trained and prepared to perish in its attempt to defend itself against any onslaught from without. Thus, ultimately, it is the individual who is the unit. This does not exclude dependence on and willing help from neighbors or from the world. It will be free and voluntary play of mutual forces. Such a society is necessarily highly cultured, in which every man and woman knows what he or she wants and, what is more, knows that no one should want anything that others cannot have with equal labor.

This society must naturally be based on Truth and Non-Violence which, in my opinion, are not possible without a living belief in God, meaning a self-existent, all-knowing living force which inheres every other force known to the world but which depends on none and which will live when all other forces may conceivably perish or cease to act. I am unable to account for my life without belief in this all-embracing living light.

In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever widening, never ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units.

Therefore, the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle but give strength to all within and derive its own from the centre. I may be taunted with the retort that this is all Utopian and therefore not worth a single thought. If Euclid's point, though incapable of being drawn by human agency, has an imperishable value, my picture has its own for mankind to live. [...] If there ever is to be a republic of every village in India, then I claim verity for my picture in which the last is equal to the first, or in other words, none is to be the first and none the last."

Images of "Gardens of God", the beautiful city of equality, equal human rights and economic, political and social justice or a world house in an inescapable network of mutuality, mutual aid and solidarity, based on compassion and empathy – they seem to strive for an oasis in the desert or the wilderness. And they refer, like all political theology, not only to the apocalyptic Book of Revelation, the last days of mankind, but also to the Book Genesis in the beginning of the creation and the Garden of Eden.

But what is the meaning and the significance of the Garden of

Eden derived from the Akkadian term *edinu*, which means 'plain': "... the "Garden of Eden" with the construct element "of," but the Hebrew text has 'gan-beeden', which is not in the construct form, and that the preposition "be" in 'beeden' is to be translated as "in." Therefore, it is grammatically incorrect to translate 'gan-beeden' as "Garden of Eden," but the "Garden in Eden." [...] The water from the garden was the water-source for the two great rivers: Tigris and Euphrates, which are well-known in ancient Mesopotamia for the production of irrigation systems in the surrounding area. Its location then should be placed somewhere in Mesopotamia."³⁰

The "Garden of Eden" is not only God's, but also the first residence of the first human beings, Adam and Eve – but even more: the "Garden of Eden" with the "Tree of Life" and the "Tree of Knowledge", with the apple and the serpent: "For the narrator of Genesis, the "Garden in Eden" was imaginatively constructed for an etiological (origin or cause of things) purpose ..."; it was the allegorical topography of the beginning of mankind, but also the symbolic image of a paradise lost, right from the beginning, which humanity - after a long history - strives to regain, vis-à-vis the Tree of Life - protected by cherubims (angels) "placed at the east of the Garden of Eden", but with "a flaming sword which turned every way" (Genesis 3:24), the image similar to that of Gandhi – fully aware of Jesus' warning that those who take the sword shall perish by the sword – who, in his 1909 book on "Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule", had associated *Satyagraha* with: "... an all-sided sword, it can be used anyhow; it blesses him who uses it and him against whom it is used. Without drawing a drop of blood it produces far-reaching results. It never rusts and cannot be stolen."

Conclusion:

We can learn from these prophecies, ancient and modern, and try to reconcile the effects of industry and technology with the challenges of our time: climate cataclysm and global pandemics. A new utopia will only be realised when compassion and empathy, mutual aid and solidarity, will prevail and humanity recollects the wisdom of the prophets, like Laozi, Buddha and Isa (Jesus), like Emerson and Thoreau, Tolstoy and Gandhi: for a peaceful society, based on ecology, equality, freedom and justice.

Oh, what a beautiful city
Oh, what a beautiful city
Oh, what a beautiful city
Twelve gates to the city, hallelujah
There's three gates in the East

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There's three gates in the West
There's three gates in the North
There's three gates in the South
That makes twelve gates to the city, hallelujah
(Spiritual)

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