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# ONENESS VS. THE 1%

SHATTERING ILLUSIONS,  
SEEDING FREEDOM

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is also necessary to prevent the rise of xenophobia and hate in this age of discontent with dominant systems. While an anti-globalisation and anti-immigrant rhetoric dominated the Brexit vote and the US presidential election in 2016, it went hand in hand with further integration of the global financial system and a politics of hate. Worse, while keeping people divided, it institutionalised more deeply the rule of the 1% and immunity for the billionaires. People voted for change, they got more of the same.

In earth democracy, no species and no culture is expendable.

Diversity ensures balance; balance ensures that no single species, no one culture dominates the rest. That is why real democracy, diversity and decentralisation go hand in hand.

Gandhi's notion of swaraj simultaneously indicates a path to freedom from the Empire as well as a path to freedom from hate:

To reject foreign manufactures merely because they are foreign, and to go on wasting national time and money in the promotion, in one's country, of manufactures for which it is not suited, would be criminal folly, and a negation of the swadeshi spirit. A true votary of swadeshi will never harbour ill-will towards the foreigner; he will not be actuated by antagonism towards anybody on earth. Swadeshism is not a cult of hatred. It is a doctrine of selfless service that has its roots in the purest ahimsa, i.e. love.

If we follow the swadeshi doctrine, it would be your duty and mine to find out neighbours who can supply our wants and to teach them to supply them where they do not know how to proceed, assuming that there are neighbours who are in want of healthy occupation. Then every village in India will almost be a self-supporting and self-contained unit, exchanging only such necessary commodities with other villages where they are not locally producible. In such an economic system there will be an organic relationship between production, distribution and consumption.<sup>5</sup>

**Satyagraha: the resurgence of real resistance, real democracy**

Satyagraha, or the force of truth, was Gandhi's word for non-cooperation with and non-participation in systems, structures, laws, paradigms, and policies that destroy the earth and rob us of our humanity and our freedoms. Satyagraha is the deepest practice of democracy, a 'No' from the highest

consciousness, the moral duty to not cooperate with unjust and brute law and exploitative and undemocratic processes. Higher moral laws compel citizens to disobey lower laws that institutionalise injustice and violence. Thoreau puts it succinctly:

The only obligation which I have a right to assume is to do at any time what I think is right. It is truly enough said that a corporation has no conscience; but a corporation of conscientious men is a corporation with a conscience. Law never made men a whit more just; and, by means of their respect for it, even the well-disposed are daily made the agents of injustice.

I would add that as long as the superstition exists that the fictions and illusions of the 1% must be believed in, and be allowed to destroy real knowledge, real intelligence, real wealth, and real freedom, our slavery to the 1% will persist. As slaves to the edifice of illusions that creates the mechanical mind and the money machine, we become complicit in the processes that are destroying the earth and humanity.

But satyagraha, or non-cooperation, passive resistance, did not begin with Gandhi or Thoreau. It has been the deepest democratic practice through the ages to defend freedom. Gandhi himself acknowledged that he did not 'invent' satyagraha, he learnt it from the people of India. As he writes in *Hind Swaraj*:

The fact is that, in India, the nation at large has generally used passive resistance in all departments of life. We cease to cooperate with our rulers when they displease us. This is passive resistance.<sup>6</sup>

Satyagraha is more important than ever today, in our age of 'post truth'. It was, and has always been, about awakening our conscience, our inner power, to resist an externally imposed cruel and unjust system.

Gandhi's Salt Satyagraha inspired Navdanya's Seed Satyagraha, or the Seed Freedom movement. Since 1987, when I first heard corporations talking about owning seeds through Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), my conscience refused to accept it. I made a lifetime commitment to saving seeds, to not cooperate with IPR systems that make seed saving and seed exchange a crime.

Bija Satyagraha (Seed Satyagraha) is a people's movement for the resurgence of the real seed, of the intelligence of farmers to be breeders, and to co-evolve with the intelligence of the seed towards diversity resilience and quality. The Bija Satyagraha pledge that our farmers take says,

We have received these seeds from nature and our ancestors. It is our duty to future generations to hand them over in the richness of diversity and integrity in which we received them. Therefore, we will not obey any law, or adopt any technology that interferes in our higher duties to the earth and the future generations. We will continue to save and share our seeds.

Since 1991, Navdanya has organised farmers through the Bija Satyagraha movement to keep seed in farmer's hands and not cooperate with IPR laws and seed acts that are based on the illusion that seeds are inventions of corporations like Monsanto. In 1993, half-a-million farmers participated in a historic Bija Satyagraha rally at Bangalore's Cubbon Park, the first international protest against General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)/WTO.

In 2014, through the Seed Satyagraha we stopped a seed law that would have made farmers saving and exchanging their local varieties, illegal. The Global Seed Freedom Movement practiced similar satyagrahas in Europe, Colombia, and California to

prevent the introduction of compulsory registration laws that criminalise farmers' seed varieties.

The Jal Satyagraha against Coca-Cola in Kerala and in Doon Valley stopped the beverage giant from stealing water. The Water Democracy movement to defend the Ganga and prevent privatisation of its water for Delhi halted the World Bank-funded water privatisation project. Satyagrahas initiated by women against industrial aquaculture in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha successfully protected people's right to safe drinking water.

Real freedom is based on the freedom to defend our rivers and our water as a commons; to defend our seeds, and our healthy, nutritious indigenous foods.

We undertook the Sarson Satyagraha (Mustard Satyagraha) in 1998 against the ban on indigenous cold pressed edible oils to facilitate the dumping of GMO soya oil in India. That is why cold pressed oils, including mustard oil, are available in the country today. In 2015, we renewed the Sarson Satyagraha when an attempt was made to introduce GMO mustard. In December 2015, we undertook a satyagraha when pseudo safety laws were trying to shut down Gandhi's cold press oil mill in Sevagram, Maharashtra. These satyagrahas have brought the right to safe, healthy indigenous food centre stage.

In 1998, the global soya lobby started to dump GMO soya oil in India and manipulated a ban on indigenous cold press oil mills as a result of which 5,00,000 village oil mills across the country were closed. No indigenous oils were available. Members of the Women's Food Sovereignty Alliance called me from the slums of Delhi and said we must bring our mustard oil back. That is when we started the Sarson Satyagraha, civil disobedience against

the laws that banned our mustard, and the making of our own edible oils, from our own oilseeds, with our own hands.

In 2017, a satyagraha organised by the Mahila Anna Swaraj (Food Sovereignty in Women's Hand), a network of more than five million women producers, was successful in blocking food safety standards that would have shut down women's artisanal processing. And satyagrahas of the tribals in Niyamgiri in Odisha and of peasants in Singur and Nandigram in West Bengal halted the corporate land grab unleashed by globalisation.

Examples of trying to make the local, ecological and democratic alternatives illegal include repeated attempts by seed corporations to criminalise local seeds and seed-saving by farmers, and the move to make local, artisanal food production illegal.<sup>7</sup>

Fresh, local and artisanal food, without chemical additives and industrial processing, is recognised as the healthiest food. This is why, until the 1990s, food processing in India was reserved for the small-scale and cottage industry sector. The WTO rules changed our food and agriculture systems dramatically. Today, we are living with food imperialism. We have become a sick nation due to the rapid spread of industrially-processed and junk foods.

The oils most Indians consume as 'vegetable oil' these days are industrially processed, imported palm and soya oils. Unlike sesame, mustard, groundnut, linseed and coconut, these are not true oils because they cannot be processed in *ghanis* or through cold press.

The oil from soya is extracted at high temperatures in hexane solvent extraction plants. Hexane is a crude oil-based organic solvent with many industrial uses and is a neurotoxicant. No tests or labelling inform citizens about this process and the

inclusion of GMOs in our food chain. In industrially refined oils, 30 per cent 'blending' in 'refined' oils is legal. The adulterants are labelled as 'vegetable oils', without letting consumers know that vegetable oils include oil from the toxic GMO cotton seed. GMO foods are not allowed in India, yet Bt cotton seed oil is being freely blended in industrial 'edible' oils.

It is industrial food with added chemicals that needs to be tested in labs, not just for artificial ingredients but also for the impact of chemical additives and industrial processing on our health. The new food safety rules are arbitrary because they do not differentiate between artisanal, chemical-free processing of oil from the industrial, chemical, crude oil-based processes. Imposing chemical labs on a *ghani* ensures that safe foods made in the artisanal sector are shut down in order to create a monopoly by corporations for unhealthy and unsafe foods.

Pure virgin oil from the *ghani* is still sold at Gandhi's Sevagram Ashram and people come from far and wide to buy it. Food safety in the artisanal sector needs participatory systems where citizens who produce the oil and those who consume it set the standards of quality and reliability. Just as there are participatory guarantee systems for organic production, we need participatory systems for artisanal food processing.

Imported and adulterated edible oils dominate the market because they are subsidised and their ecological and health costs are hidden and externalised. For instance, in India, the import duty of edible oil was reduced in 1998 from 300 per cent to zero, an indirect subsidy. In addition, the Indian government subsidises soya oil by Rs 15 per litre.<sup>8</sup> This is over and above the subsidy given by the US government to it.

The expansion of palm oil plantations is the primary reason for the destruction of rainforests in Indonesia; the expansion of

GMO soya plantations is a major cause for the destruction of the Amazon rainforests and Cerrado, in Brazil and Argentina. Forest destruction contributes 18 per cent of greenhouse gases and 85 per cent of rainforest destruction is accounted for by the expansion of industrial agriculture. Palm oil cultivation in Indonesia accounted for an estimated two to nine per cent of all tropical land use emissions from 2000 to 2010. The country was the world's seventh-largest polluter in 2009, and deforestation accounted for about 30 per cent of these emissions, ranking second (behind Brazil) in pollution due to deforestation. Soya cultivation in India destroys soil fertility and is ruining farmers in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. Gandhi's *ghani* is a symbol of our freedom from a new corporate imperialism trying to control what we grow on our farms, how we process our food and what we eat. While the current food safety laws originate in the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agreement of the WTO, with the Doha Round of the WTO as good as dead after the Nairobi Ministerial held from December 15-19, 2015, the toxic food industry is getting ready to impose the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal which will fully dismantle our food safety systems. We must act now to reclaim our right to grow and eat safe, healthy, indigenous foods.

On January 30, 2016, Gandhi's martyrdom day, I joined Gandhians in Sevagram, in defence of Gandhi's *ghani* as a symbol of swadeshi food. And we have made a commitment to introduce tiny *ghanis* in as many villages as possible, to create artisanal livelihoods, to make healthy cold press oil accessible to all, and to create a local circular economy so that farmers can grow the diversity of oilseeds that have been displaced by imports of bad oil, and by the spread of monocultures.

In April 2017, on the anniversary of the Champaran

Satyagraha, we undertook a satyagraha yatra, starting in Meerut. We visited Varanasi to celebrate the 1810 movement against the British imposed house tax. On April 17, we undertook a pilgrimage to Champaran, the day Gandhi started his satyagraha against the forced cultivation of indigo. We then joined the valiant communities of Singur and Nandigram who prevented a land grab for an industrial project through a land satyagraha. After paying homage to those who participated in the Salt Satyagraha of 1930 by travelling the salt road in Odisha, we concluded our yatra on Earth Day at the Navdanya community seed bank in Odisha, which has spread seeds of hope across India, after cyclones, after the tsunami and after repeated droughts.

Over four-and-a-half decades, I have participated in many satyagrahas, beginning with the Chipko movement, and my commitment to our common freedoms grows deeper with time. The planetary satyagraha we need today is for each of us to break free of the prisons in our minds created by the 1% through constructs and illusions, while we unleash our intelligence and latent power to begin a resurgence of the real. Today's non-cooperation movement begins with not subscribing to the fictions and falsehoods through which we are colonised, and by not cooperating with the structures of violence and domination built through these fictions to uphold structures of extraction and exploitation. Breaking free of the 1% is the satyagraha of our times.

Real freedom and real wealth creation call for the practice of satyagraha, swaraj and swadeshi with integrity and integration. Resistance without another imagination rooted in the real, combined with constructive action, will not create another world. Sowing the seeds of freedom is not imaginary; it is a conscious

act, an act in which we become one with the earth. Oneness is our being, our source of power. Our power to resist, non-violently. Our power to co-create, non-violently.

Recently, the High Court of Uttarakhand in India ruled that Himalayan mountain ranges, glaciers, rivers, streams, rivulets, lakes, jungles, the air, forests, meadows, dales, wetlands, grasslands and springs are living beings and legal entities with rights.<sup>9</sup> The legislature in Madhya Pradesh recognised the personhood of the Narmada river in May 2017 to ensure 'conservation of aquatic biodiversity'. These juridical and paradigm shifts that are taking place create new possibilities for sustainable societies and earth democracies. The Monsanto Tribunal and General Assembly that we organised in October 2016 in The Hague had brought witnesses from across the world on one platform to share evidence on Monsanto's crimes against nature and humanity on record. This is earth democracy in practice. And while we resist the untruth, the violent, we are also sowing seeds of hope and freedom.

### **Seeding the future, seeding freedom through earth democracy**

Seeding the future when possible extinction stares us in the face, seeding freedom when all freedoms of all beings are being closed for the limitless freedom of the 1% to exploit the earth and people, to manipulate life and our minds, calls for a quantum leap in our imaginations, our intelligences, our capacity for compassion and love, as well as our courage for creative nonviolent resistance and non-cooperation with a system that is driving us to extinction.

Our only option is to heal the earth, and in so doing, heal

and reclaim our humanity, creating hope for our only future—as one humanity on one planet. Stephen Hawking’s two options—become extinct or escape from planet earth to other planets, are not the only two futures available to humanity.<sup>10</sup>

There is a third option beyond extinction and escape, the alternative of rejuvenating the earth to be able to continue to live here, in the particular places and the planet we call home. This is our evolutionary challenge. If we awaken to our own intelligence and evolutionary potential, and the intelligence pervading our planet and the universe we do not need to slip into the despair and hopelessness of inevitable extinction, or the hubris of conquest and mastery over other planets.

Elon Musk wants to create a Space X city on Mars: ‘By talking about the Space X Mars architecture, I want to make Mars seem possible—make it seem as though it is something that we can do in our lifetime,’ he writes, adding, ‘There really is a way that anyone could go if they wanted to.’ Musk believes the threshold for a self-sustaining city on Mars would be one million people. Current calculations indicate that it would take between 40 to 100 years ‘to achieve a fully self-sustaining civilization on Mars.’<sup>11</sup>

In less than the one hundred years that the masters of the universe would like one-eighth of the human population to climb into a spaceship and escape to Mars (there is, of course, no mention of the rest of humanity and the rest of species) humanity could regenerate the planet, rejuvenate the earth’s soils, water, biodiversity, bring about a balance between humans, and provide enough food for all.

For Musk, as for Hawking, there are only two fundamental paths for mankind—that we stay on earth forever, eventually succumbing to an extinction event, or to become a ‘space bearing-civilization and a multi-planetary species’. Musk, like

all men suffering from technological hubris, does not seem to understand that being a planetary citizen does not need space travel. It means being conscious that we are part of the universe and the earth, and that we need to live in accordance with the laws of the universe, of the earth. The most fundamental law is to recognise that we share the planet with other beings, and that we have a duty to care for our common home.

The physical capacity to organise space flights has already been achieved. We now need to evolve our planetary consciousness as earth citizens. The wider our consciousness, the smaller our ecological footprint. I would translate for the contemporary evolutionary moment Gandhi’s distillation of universal ecological responsibility when he said, ‘The earth provides enough for everyone’s needs, but not for a few people’s greed.’ Today, we need to recognise that the earth provides enough for all beings and their future evolution. Extinction looks inevitable only in a worldview driven by greed, by hubris, by a mechanical, militarised intelligence for conquest. To assume that flying to Mars is equal to creating life on Mars, and building a self-sustaining civilisation there is the leap of hubris and arrogance, ignorance and indifference.

Both Hawking and Musk seem to have ignored the fact that the earth is a self-organised, living planet which creates the conditions for its life and all the species that have evolved on it. That the earth, and every living being, the tiniest of cells, has the capacity to heal, renew, regenerate. Hope comes from this potential, from the fact that we share the planet with millions of species. It is irresponsible, immoral, and unethical to think that we can continue to trash the planet and escape to another one, even if it were to become technologically feasible to do so.

Staying home is an ecological imperative, an ethical imperative.

It is also a joyful option. It is the practice of Oikonomia as the art of living. It is earth democracy in action, cultivating and expanding the freedoms of all beings.

In the face of the hyper anthropocentrism and hyper greed of the 1%, which is exterminating the diversity of species, and rendering the 99% disposable, our power for change comes from being part of the earth family. In the awareness that we are one with the earth and all her beings we become aware that we are one as humanity. The web of life unites us. The power of Big Money and its political machine divides us by locking us in narrow, fragmented, constructed identities, creating the illusion of our separation from the earth, and through that separation, the illusion that it is the money machine that runs our lives. That we will have no food without the Monsantos and Cargills, no water without the Cokes and the Pepsis, no health without Big Pharma, no friends without Facebook, no communication without Twitter, no money without Big Banks, no energy without Big Oil, no knowledge without Big Data.

A mechanical mind locks us into thinking that every inclusion of the Other in our being and consciousness is a shrinking of our space and our freedoms. But the ecological space, where life renews and regenerates, is not a two-dimensional Cartesian space. It is a four-dimensional space of 'desha' and 'kala', space and time, where life evolves in intelligence and vibrance and diversity. The greater the density of interactions and relations in life's ecological space, the more we enlarge our own freedoms and possibilities.

The business of grabbing and money-making, through a violent extractive economy that the 1% have built is burdening the earth and humanity with unbearable and non-sustainable costs, and has brought us to the brink of extinction.

We do not have to escape from the earth, we have to escape from the illusions that enslave our minds and make extinction look inevitable

We are living through the latest phase of an epic struggle that has shaped human history through the ages, between the power of domination and destruction, mastery and ownership, and the non-violent power of co-creation, cooperation, co-evolution. The power of violence and destruction comes from separation—from nature and from each other. Our non-violent power comes from interconnectedness and oneness. This is why seed by seed, farmer by farmer, plate by plate, we are sowing an alternative based on intelligence and science, responsibility and awareness, care and compassion. And in the process, more species are flourishing, there is more food, more rejuvenation of our biodiversity, our soil, and our water. The potential for a healthier planet and society, with more knowledge among more people, and an earth democracy based on the intelligence of all life evolving is before us, and it is real. It heralds the resurgence of the real.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> M.K. Gandhi, *Panchayat Raj*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1996, pp. 11-12.

<sup>2</sup> Vandana Shiva and Vaibhav Singh, *Wealth per Acre*. New Delhi: Natraj Publishers, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Ernst F. Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful: Economics As If People Mattered*, first published in 1973; New York: Harper & Row.

<sup>4</sup> Maria Popova, 'Buddhist Economics: How to Start Prioritizing People Over Products and Creativity Over Consumption', *Brainpickings.org*. <https://www.brainpickings.org/2014/07/07/buddhist-economics-schumacher/>.

<sup>5</sup> R.K. Prabhu and V.R. Rao (Ed.) *From the Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1966, Chapter 87. <http://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/mindofmahatmagandhi.pdf>.