

**Food as a political tool:  
an analysis of the use of food towards attaining and sustaining swaraj (Indian  
independence) in the thought of Gandhi and Shiva**

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**I. Introduction**

Food is power. Food has a fundamental, constantly changing role throughout human culture and history. Food is, after all, a basic need, the very stuff of life (Shiva 2001). The role of food is complex and multidimensional; it “touches everything...is the foundation of every economy...and is a central pawn in political strategies of states and households” (Counihan and Van Esterik 1997, 1). Through cultural practices such as hunting and gathering, market forces, economically significant jobs, celebrations, or on a larger scale through governmental regulation, “inevitably, people use food to satisfy many needs beyond those for simple nutrients” (Anderson 2005, 62). Certainly food, as a concept, is more than nutrition; food has always been a special and glorious expression of self, culture, societal, economic and political autonomy. Food often takes on distinct meaning as a “vehicle for transmitting cultural traditions and identities when a group is marginalized by race, ethnicity, language or religion” (D'Sylva and Beagan 2011, 280). Food is also an effective means of power and control; food is “linked to overall social hierarchies and power relations” --in other words, food is political (Counihan and Van Esterik 1997, 3).

The exploration of food as a political tool warrants close attention and analysis. This paper, then, describes and analyzes the concept of food utilized as a political tool in India, a nation of over a billion. The control of the food system is an issue of vital importance. This is complicated because India is a nation that has (and is) torn by religious extremism accounting for its distinction as the nation with the longest history of social and political conflict (Gandhi 1996, 4). Compounding this tendency towards conflict is India's long history of vulnerability to both localized and widespread famine. India, then, is ideal for the examination of food as a political tool and means of subjugation and control. The issues at the core of food— political control and economic exploitation on the one hand, and liberation and self-sufficiency on the other— figure prominently throughout the works of two Indian political thinkers: Vandana Shiva and Mahatma Gandhi.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948), or Mahatma<sup>1</sup> Gandhi as followers fondly knew him, was quite unlike other significant political and cultural figures of his time. This is primarily due to the particular way in which Gandhi moved his political theory—i.e. thoughts, concepts, and ideology—from ideas into action, encouraging his followers, for whom he set an enduring example, to join of their own accord in his nonviolent strategy on behalf of the poor and for decolonization. Indeed, Gandhi initiated and guided the Indian movement that would culminate in its establishment as the world's democracy, a process that would continue decolonization for years after his death. Peculiar to his struggles is that Gandhi “meticulously and truthfully wielded power nonviolently” (Dalton 1996, 3). To best understand Gandhi's use of food and agriculture as a political tool, and to contrast his main arguments to that of Shiva, I will use multiple primary and secondary sources.

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<sup>1</sup> An endearing term and honorific title; meaning "great soul"

Vandana Shiva (1952-) is an Indian ecofeminist who has held a leading position within the Anti-Globalization Movement (Cochrane 2007, 169). A world-renowned environmental thinker, Shiva is not only an activist, but has been a prominent physicist in India, in addition to serving as the director of Navdanya<sup>2</sup> and the Research Foundation for Science, Technology, and Natural Resource Policy (Shiva 2008, 145). Shiva has also authored and edited many books and publications focusing primarily upon seeds, the environment, farmers' and India's proper role (or lack thereof) in a global society.

### **I. A. Methodology and Argumentation**

I will use multiple original and primary sources as well as secondary sources and related texts and articles (both scholarly and popular) to develop a deeper understanding of Gandhi's and Shiva's use of food and agriculture as a political tool. I will use the method of comparative political theory as I contrast, compare, and analyze Gandhi's and Shiva's main arguments, thoughts, and actions. The method of comparative political theory is a relatively new field of scholarly inquiry, and thus, as Fred Dallmayr explains, further explanation and clarification is needed (Dallmayr 2010, xi). As a subfield of political theory or political philosophy, working in the context of "civil society"—"a realm that forms a bridge between the strictly 'private' and strictly 'public' domains of life"—comparative political theory "concentrates not so much on governmental structures and empirical political processes (the concern of 'comparative politics') but rather on the ideas, perspectives, and theoretical frameworks," past and present that have emerged from the world's various regions, cultures, and worldviews (Dallmayr 2010, x).

Additionally, comparative political theory is pertinent in that it emphasizes "cross-cultural

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<sup>2</sup> Navadanya can be translated to mean "nine seeds," (symbolizing protection of biological and cultural diversity) and also the "new gift" (for seed as commons, based on the right to save and share seeds). An organization founded with the direction of Vandana Shiva, it exists to provide direction and support to environmental activism, particularly in India. For more information, see <http://www.navdanya.org/about-us>.

encounters, mutual learning, and (what has been called) ‘dialogue among civilizations’” (Dallmayr 2010, xi). Dallmayr’s understanding is important for it implies that, though culture has profound influence, nevertheless, individuals, ideas and learning are not bound by culture or historical circumstance. Thus, cross-cultural dialogue is possible, and serves as a means to, not simply learn about, aspects of cultures unto themselves, but to reasonably posit standards by which to evaluate the relative justice of the political and economic power structures of cultures-- both within a given culture, between cultures and/or between different eras within a culture.

Although working in different time periods and political contexts, and with different emphases placed upon the self and India’s role as nation vs. India’s role in a global society, I argue that both Shiva and Gandhi have used food as a political tool to further their respective ends. Gandhi worked to achieve political independence and self-sufficiency; Shiva is working to maintain Indian autonomy (particularly with the right to seed). To demonstrate this, I will first examine the connection between food and political and economic security, providing a relevant backdrop that will give clarity to the understanding of food as more than merely nutrition. Second, I will explain the concept of *swaraj*, using it to compare Gandhi’s use of food for the attainment of *swaraj* (with emphasis upon the role of the self), to Shiva’s use of food for the maintenance of *swaraj* (placing emphasis upon the role of Indian farmers within a global, and not so much personal/moral context). Finally, I will examine the practical application of Gandhi’s and Shiva’s work.

## **II. Food Security and Context**

Both Gandhi and Shiva emphasize the need to lessen the hunger and malnourishment within a significant portion of the Indian population. Both political thinkers, then, deem it

necessary to call attention to the importance of food security, especially in times of economic and/or political crisis or when the rights and self-sufficiency of Indian citizens are in jeopardy.

For Gandhi, “food security” is a response to the food crisis India was experiencing in the 1940s, a time when India’s colonial power, Great Britain, was at war with the Axis Powers (Japan, Germany, and Italy) and was in severe economic crisis after their victory in 1945. Gandhi argues that true food security means that the production of food was done at the village level--the *Indian* village. As a consequence, all exports were to be halted, as “relying on outside help made [India] still more dependent,” and equal and fair access to quality food [considered to be better with locally-grown food] was of great importance (Gandhi 1946b, 25). Equal access to good food meant not that “ [the Indian people] will eat sweets...but that everyone must get pure milk, pure ghee [butter] and sufficient fruit and vegetables” (Gandhi 1996, 134). Food independence and security is achievable through a societal and economic system that allows for hard work, manual labor and the ability to reap the just rewards therefrom. This is important for “[I]n Gandhi’s scheme, the foundation of rural development is based on the solid work of workers” (Pandey 2008, 143). Of course, Gandhi’s thought regarding food is predicated upon Indian autonomy from Great Britain as a colonial power.

Shiva bases her understanding of the concept of food security within a wider, more theoretical context; that is, her understanding is more than a methodological means whereby good food, through sound political policy, is made available to all people. Indeed, Shiva’s approach is almost visionary in that, at root, the “seed [is] the ultimate symbol of food security,” as the seed “is not merely the source of future plants and food; it is the *storage place of culture and history*” (Shiva 2001, 8). So, although similar in its basics to Gandhi’s conception of food security, as Gandhi sees food security as tied to history and culture and land, Shiva’s approach is

more theoretical and less anthropocentric (e.g. not focusing primarily on the basics of feeding the poor). Shiva's understanding of the concept of food security is tied to the land (seed), its culture, and its history, and seed are seen as an end with intrinsic meaning, not solely as a pragmatic means to human ends. Shiva expands beyond food security to food sovereignty, which includes the socio-economic means of food security, but also treats concepts of where the food comes from and how it is produced (Shiva 2009, 80).

An interesting and important element present in both Shiva's and Gandhi's conception of food security is cooperation. Cooperation, in the eyes of both Shiva and Gandhi, is essential for food security. For Gandhi, an ideal village will have food security under a just government with the rule of law. A village should be able to "produce its own grains, vegetables and fruit, and its own [homespun material]," production which is built upon the "cooperation of the people" (Gandhi 1946a, 295). Now, Shiva accepts Gandhi's emphasis to a point, but views the essence of food security in the free exchange of seed (again, seed is key to food security) among farmers "based on cooperation and reciprocity" (Shiva 2000, 8).

Both Gandhi and Shiva understand that food security can change noticeably during a time of famine, a time characterized by "some people not having enough food to eat" (Goswami 1990, 445). As a result, cooperation becomes strained and security is threatened. Famine under British colonial rule was common and thus it is prevalent in Gandhi's work, shaping the nature of his interactions with the British state and people (Gandhi 1946a). There is little food security during a time of famine, and the role of food is more extensively examined and criticized as the threat of famine arises. During the last quarter of the 19th century, for example, the role of the colonial state was shaped and strengthened with the control of agriculture and goods, and with the relief

and onset of famine (Amrith 2008). Food security, Gandhi understands, is inherently tenuous within colonial systems.

Regarding the colonial paradigm, historian Sunil S. Amrith (2008) focuses on how food has been used in the exercise and legitimization of governmental power in India, and how this changes with famine. Amrith's understanding of the role of the colonial state recognizes famine as having "marked a transformation in the nature of government in colonial India." The 1880 Famine Commission can be seen as an example of this form of changing control; "the question of hunger became central to discourses of legitimate power in India at this time. The protection of the population from starvation authorized new justifications of political power and political intervention" (Amrith 2008, 1013). Periodic bouts of famine, part and parcel of the long history of the British rule of India, then, was used as a convenient excuse for their "benign" intervention despite the fact that it was the unjust colonial economic and political system that made India more prone to famine. This fit into the interest of the British Empire, for India was its economic 'jewel in the crown'" and thus necessarily the "object of...imperial domination" (Gandhi 1996, 17).

However, from 1908 to 1943, famine was not present within India (although malnourishment and poverty was still present) (Goswami 1990; Amrith 2009, 1015). With the global economic depression of the 1930s, both political leaders and the Indian people began to question the role of food in Indian politics and society. The true extent of malnutrition became more clear as the new science of nutrition impacted India's view of the quality of food (Amrith 2008, 1016). The differences in food, the types, access, and amount was exacerbated by the increase in population, which spiked around the turn of the century, as well as put stress upon the Indian social strata, for example, "divisions between castes, between Hindu and Muslim, and

between different regions of British India” (Amrith 2008, 1014). Even India’s progress towards industrialization was affected. Industrial workers, “under the gaze of employers and the state, suffered from widespread nutritional deficiency, both in quantity and quality” (Amrith 2008, 1017).

The Bengal famine of 1943 is a prime example of crisis, a shifting role of government, and a rising correlation in diet and socioeconomic status. The 1943 Bengal famine starved to death more than three million people (Goswami 1990). Under the colonial system, food grains were not appropriated correctly, price controls were malfunctioning, and, just before the famine onset, 80,000 tons of food grain was exported from Bengal for use in the British war effort. In effect, the British used their colonial control of India as a supply base for the British military. In Shiva’s reflection upon the crisis of the Bengal famine struggle, “[t]he starving Bengal peasants gave up over two-thirds of the food they produced, leading their debt to double. This coupled with speculation, hoarding, and profiteering by traders, led to skyrocketing prices” (Shiva 2000, 5).

Gandhi saw the price control efforts of the British government to be “a complete failure” due to the kind of instability pointed out by Shiva above (1946a, 70). He concludes that “the absence of control will be far more in the interests of the consumer than inefficient and incomplete control”... “If there is no control [by the government], the public have a special responsibility” (Gandhi 1946a, 71). This idea of social responsibility shows Gandhi’s echoing of the importance of self-reliance and self-sufficiency, especially on the local level. The politics of food, then, is a necessary community building rallying point “of social solidarity that underpinned the efflorescence of voluntary activity in the early twentieth century” (Amrith 2008, 1014). Further, “this embodiment of sympathy [reflected in community building] was evident,



from the start, in Gandhi's mode of responding to starvation. In response to news of famine in India, Gandhi wrote, "To be one nation means believing that, when a single Indian dies of starvation, all of us are dying of it..." (1014). Hence, Gandhi's response ties directly to his conception of *swaraj*, i.e. that individuals must be self-sufficient, which includes food security, in order for the Indian nation to be unified and politically independent.

During the 1950s-1960s, India, now independent of the colonial system, saw not only continued famine and drought but also harsh economic conditions. Major industries were impacted severely by the recession, unemployment was rising, and per capita income was lowering at an alarming rate (Dasgupta 1977, 241). Amidst this, India relied heavily on food imports, particularly from the United States (241). In this time of uncertainty and food insecurity--the time period between Gandhi's death and Shiva's emergence into ecological and environmental activism--the Green Revolution took place. The creation of the Green Revolution is generally ascribed to agronomist Norman Borlaug. It was introduced in the Punjab region of India in 1965 and 1966, during a time of drought and sustained famine, and refers to the development of disease resistant crop varieties that produced higher yields than traditional varieties. However, such strains also required fertilizers, modern machinery and more intensive irrigation to achieve their yields, and an increased use of pesticides resulting in environmental degradation (Duggan, 2010). The "Green Revolution" itself was a product of globalization--the process whereby "regional economy, society, and cultures become integrated through a global network of social, cultural, economic, political and environmental [forces]" (Kaur and Sinha 2011, 35). A definite correlation exists between the forces of globalization--which favor the multinational corporations of rich nations--and the oppression of those economies, societies, and cultures, largely of developing nations, that it affects. In the context of India, for example, Shiva

argues that “modernizing agriculture (still the primary livelihood for three-quarters of humanity) through biotechnological fixes and globalization strategies has encouraged a shift in production from food to export crops and thereby reduced food security; flooded the local market with imports that have wiped out local business and diversity; and paved the way for global corporations to take over the control of food processing” (Shiva 2006, 238). Yield figures of the Green Revolution miracle seeds were calculated to be significantly higher than those for both traditional and locally improved varieties. However, the new seeds were incredibly vulnerable to pests and weeds, which has led to increased application of pesticides and other weed-fighting chemicals (Dasgupta 1977, 243).

Shiva, then, has directed a large portion of her activism on counteracting the effects of the Green Revolution. According to Shiva, the basic “assumption was that commercializing and making agriculture more dependent on purchases would create a capitalist alternative to the spread of communism”-- there was nothing “green” about the Green Revolution (Shiva 2008, “Interview”). On the contrary, the forces of globalization, according to Shiva, forced the Green Revolution upon India, for example, the “loans linked to structural adjustment to move seeds, pesticides and chemicals” (Shiva 2008, “Interview”). This policy pushed farmers into debt, left the land desertified, and destroyed variety of all sorts (Shiva 2008, “Interview”). Shiva has been working against the misdirected, corporate “principles” of the Green Revolution, against global seed control and restrictions, and for a “true green revolution, [which] is the ecological agriculture revolution” (Shiva 2008, “Interview”). In the midst of the after-effects of the Green Revolution and the current food crisis, Shiva finds a solution, namely, “to reclaim food sovereignty and rebuild local food economies based on ecological farming,” adding that “this path also frees agriculture from its dependence on fossil fuels [and chemicals] while increasing

mitigation and adaptation to climate change...a shift from soil to oil addresses the triple crisis of climate, energy, and food” (Shiva 2008, 96). Given this context, both Gandhi and Shiva attempted to make strides to increase cooperation among villagers, to aim towards food security on the local level, so that a path can be laid for the success of local economies, a decentralized food system that puts power in the hands of local growers, and ultimately, self-sufficiency and *swaraj* (Indian independence or home rule). I will explore this more fully later in the paper.

Yet, Shiva expands Gandhi’s understanding of *swaraj*. Keeping in mind the inherent injustices of globalization, Shiva writes that amidst globalization and climate crisis, in order to move beyond fuel-dependent insecurity, “we need to reinvent democracy and reconfigure the understanding of *swaraj*” as “a renewable-energy economy will only be built through the renewable energy of free and self-organized citizens and communities” (Shiva, 2008, 134). Shiva sees this transition as not only a technical, physical transition that will take time and effort, but it is also “above all a political transition in which we stop being passive and become active agents of transformation by recognizing that we have the capacity, the energy, and the creativity to make the change” (Shiva 2008, 134).

### **III. *Swaraj*: Achievement and maintenance of Indian home rule through an agricultural lens**

*Swaraj* can be translated as “home rule,” or Indian independence. *Swaraj* has referred to a politically focused form of security, meaning “a sovereign kingdom’s freedom from external control” (Duncan 2005, 11). However, for Gandhi, as well as Shiva, *swaraj* is more than freedom from external control; it encapsulates the process of personal, cultural, and national independence.

*Swaraj* held a central role in Gandhi's efforts. Gandhi took this traditional meaning and expanded it to include both Indian home rule and self rule, including in the definition the concept of "being liberated in an internal, spiritual, or psychological sense, as being free from illusion and ignorance, free to gain greater self-knowledge and consequent self-mastery" (Duncan 2005, 11). As Gandhi stated, "*swaraj* wasn't going to descend on us from the heavens. It will not be received as a gift from the British Empire either. It can only be the reward of our own efforts. The very word *swaraj* means effort by the nation" (1996, 100). According to Parel, Gandhi's *swaraj* can be further explained as '*hind swaraj*,' which not only included "political *swaraj* and economic *swaraj*, as well as aesthetic and moral renewal," but also made a strong "connection between self-realization (*atmadarshan*) and politics (*rajyaprakaran*)" (2009, xix). To Gandhi, as Parel (2009, lxxiv) states, "the two may not be radically separated. Inner change within the individual ought to be the starting point of outer changes in society." If these changes were successful, and *swaraj* was secured, Indians would have constructed this society themselves, which, as summarized by Parel (2011), would include hallmarks that "would be nonviolence, harmony between people of different religious traditions, the abolition of Untouchability, and the development of an economy based on simplicity and self-sufficiency, whose symbol was the use of khadi, or hand-spun cloth" (2011, 57).

In turn, Shiva has skillfully built upon Gandhi's theory and accomplishments, aiming to maintain *swaraj* through her efforts to protect seed, linking colonization to globalization and patent control. In fact, Shiva (2008) states, "Socially, self-organization is encapsulated in Gandhi's *swaraj* (self-rule, self-governance, self-organization). It is the basis of food sovereignty—the right to produce in freedom. Social and ecological self-organization reinforce each other [...] such economic self-organization ensures that local food needs are met and local

food security and livelihoods strengthened, preventing malnutrition, hunger, poverty, and unemployment” (Shiva 2008, 125-126).

The vital connection of food to *swaraj*, in my view, may be best explained by the following metaphor: *swaraj* pulls agriculture and political self-sufficiency together, as if agriculture and food were the bow, providing a launching base for the arrow, political self-sufficiency, to hit the target of *swaraj*, ”home rule” or independence. Shiva and Gandhi both use food with a keen Bowman's eye on the target of *swaraj*. This metaphor is important in my following analysis and examination of the physical practice of *swaraj*.

### **III. A. *Swaraj* in practice: Comparison of Gandhi and Shiva**

Both Shiva and Gandhi stress the importance of non-violence, cooperation, and were in favor of a democratic, secular India that stood for social justice, economic equality, and food security (Dalton, 1996, 14; Shiva, “Interview,” 2008). However, Gandhi’s and Shiva’s work differ in a crucial respect--the level of emphasis and importance placed upon internal vs. external self and political sufficiency. Too, Gandhi made large strides to help India attain independence from Britain, while Shiva, living in an independent India, has focused her efforts upon maintaining India’s independence from global, multinational corporations through seed sovereignty. To this end, Shiva stresses the importance of seed banks, which also serve as a center for agricultural biodiversity. According to Arenson (2011, 15), seed banks are “vitaly important in India today both because of the threat to seed sovereignty posed by large seed and agricultural corporations” and his contention that “seed banks facilitate rejuvenation of agricultural biodiversity, farmers’ self-reliance in seed locally and nationally, and farmers’ rights” (Arenson 2011, 15).

Indian independence was not fully achievable under any substantive British influence. Gandhi understood that British influence, however well intentioned, is a form of control. In his message delivered to the people of Bombay<sup>3</sup> on the discipline of prayer and the food crisis in 1946, Gandhi said, “If the British had stayed in India as the servants of the people, not their masters, and purely to defeat the Axis powers, [there] would be nothing to say. Instead, they had in their arrogance cast to the winds the warnings and protests of the people’s representatives and denuded India of her vital resources, though, perhaps, not deliberately, with the result that they all knew” (Gandhi 1946a, 31). This result was a severe food and cloth crisis—unavailability of enough food and cotton to the Indian people. To Gandhi and followers, the “British rule in India [was] a curse” (Gandhi 1946a, 75). Gandhi saw the British government as not having upheld its own professed duty to the people, even having “cried [himself] hoarse in pressing [his] solution on the Government” (Gandhi 1946b, 31). Gandhi’s solutions to overcome the cloth and food crisis were to “plant a miniature mill in every home in the form of a spinning wheel or a *takli*,” to eliminate food waste, and to cooperate on a village level, coming together to perform *satyagraha*.

Gandhi reintroduced the method of *satyagraha*, a term that was “born in South Africa in 1908,” to counteract colonial control of India, to grant political self-sufficiency to Indians, and to attempt to overcome the food and cotton agricultural crisis (Gandhi 1996, 51). For *swaraj*, Gandhi viewed “*satyagraha* as the unfailing weapon. *Satyagraha* means that...truth is want[ed]” and sought after through civil disobedience and acts of non-violence, thus “employing pure soul-force” (Gandhi 1996, 55). For Gandhi, the use of *satyagraha* was both collective and individualistic-- individuals need to overcome their personal fear, and to work for self-

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<sup>3</sup> Now called Mumbai

sufficiency, so that their collective actions all contributed to the independence of India.

*Satyagraha* was an umbrella for concrete, cooperative collective action. An example of *Satyagraha* is Gandhi's use of food and agriculture for collective action. Further examples and illustrations of *satyagraha* used to obtain political self-sufficiency can be seen in *swadeshi* and the salt march of 1930.

Gandhi wrote in one of his first publishings, *Hind Swaraj* (Indian Independence): "Real home-rule, is self-rule or self-control, the way to it is passive resistance [later, Gandhi rejected the term 'passive resistance']: that is soul-force or love-force, and in order to exert this force, *Swadeshi* in every sense is necessary" (Gandhi 1946a, 76). Through *swadeshi*, or "the reliance on the products of one's own country," the use of Indian agriculture, sold to Indians by Indians in India, could help to achieve political self-sufficiency (Gandhi 1996, 14). For Gandhi, *swadeshi* was also deeply religious. *Swadeshi*, according to Gandhi, can be described as "an eternal religious duty... not intended to serve self-interest" (Pinto 1998, 67). *Swadeshi*, as summarized by Vivek Pinto (1998) implied the following: "(1) That self reliant villages are set up by the residents of a given village, where goods will primarily be produced for use, and these villages will constitute the basic units of social organization; (2) individuals living in these villages will voluntarily reduce their wants and (3) village consumers will modify their wants to commodities produced in their neighborhoods and make all efforts to purchase them from these environs" (67-68). In effect, Gandhi believed that India could only truly be free once India fully relied on herself, and that using Indian goods at every opportunity possible would be "no small help in developing the national spirit" (Gandhi 1987, 174). Thus, a solution to the cloth famine could be accomplished by enabling "millions to spin and weave in their own villages... with the State supplying them with cotton, where it is not grown or available, and with the simple instruments

of production on hire or long-term purchase” (Gandhi 1946b, 31). In addition, *Swadeshi* was to be employed simultaneously with the boycott of foreign cloth.

In Gandhi’s understanding, a boycott needed to include the merchants just as much as the people (consumers); hence, a boycott means “an all-round honesty, perseverance, mutual trust, a voluntary and honourable triple alliance between labour, capital and the consumer” (Gandhi 1987, 179). Boycotting foreign cloth would lead India one step closer to independence, individuals would be rely upon themselves to produce their own cloth, no longer relying on foreign goods, and the country could attain economic and political autonomy. After all, as Gandhi pointedly wrote: “India cannot be free so long as India voluntarily encourages or tolerates the economic drain which has been going on for the past century and a half” (Gandhi, 1987, 357).

Another illustration of an act of *satyagraha* was the salt march of 1930, referred to as “salt *satyagraha*” (Gandhi 1996, 20). Gandhi and many of his followers made a journey of over two hundred miles in twenty-four days to the Indian seacoast, where they challenged the government’s monopoly and control on salt production by manufacturing their own salt from natural deposits on the shores. (Gandhi 1996, 20) The salt march is a prime example that shows how Gandhi used food as a means to an end; the real point of the salt march was not to produce large amounts of salt. Rather, the underlying message of the salt march was to produce disciplined civil disobedience (Gandhi 1996, 20).

Gandhi’s thought on the symbiosis of food and politics went even deeper. Gandhi weaves together food and the physical and spiritual health of the individual through his idea of “national food,” which would be vegetarian in nature and involve “social leveling, contrasting common food for common people with the lavish and indulgent foods used by the upper castes as a



marker of distinction” (Amrith 2008, 1019). Gandhi associated the evolution of nutritive “national food” with the actual practice of preparing and sharing food” (1020). According to Amrith, (2008, 1020) national food, in Gandhi’s view, “would both provide for minimum bodily needs, and foster bonds of solidarity and reciprocity within the body of the nation.”

In contrast to Gandhi, Shiva’s framework largely lacks Gandhi’s almost religious sense of *satyagraha* (which was effective and appealed greatly to Buddhists, Hindus and Christians worldwide who supported Gandhi’s tactics.). (Gandhi 1996, 4) Instead, Shiva emphasized the “seed,” the patenting of seed--of life-- as a form of the modern type of colonization. Shiva states that “the *seed satyagraha* [is] just like Gandhi's *satyagraha* when he told the British that nature gives salt for free” (Shiva 2008, “Interview”). Shiva is linked to Gandhi because she sees the importance of seed as a means of survival and compares it to the importance of Indians making their own salt, refusing to obey patent laws as Gandhi’s followers refused to obey the government’s ban of individual salt collection. Like Gandhi, too, Shiva believes that the Indian people can succeed if they maintain their independence and act out in civil disobedience through the practice of “saving open-pollinated seeds...doing organic farming, and those in the cities commit themselves to eating only food that is genuinely free of patents, GMO's [genetically modified organisms], pesticides and toxins, and free of corporate control” (Shiva 2008, “Interview”). Shiva is firm in her belief in these actions, stating, “Even if governments don't change their policies we will have created another economy. And if you look at the growth of the movement, it has grown without policy protection in spite of adverse policies. When we combine the financial, climate and food crises, the manipulative corporate economies will not survive” (Shiva 2008, “Interview”). Simply, in Shiva’s view, India’s survival depends upon her actions in this regard.

According to Shiva (2001, 132), “patents embody the political and economic arrangements of different periods of human history. In the colonial period, they were instruments of colonization and the maintenance of colonial dependence. In the post-colonial period, patents became a reflection of our striving [against eco-imperialism] for economic freedom and political sovereignty.” Shiva makes a strong case against the use of patents as colonization: “the patent regimes that are designed and shaped could reintroduce a new era of colonialism in which not only are we recolonized as a people, but all life forms are colonized” (Shiva 2001, 132). In contrast to Gandhi’s more religious-natured understanding, Shiva ascribes a visionary cultural importance to the “seed” within the oppressive context of globalization. To illustrate, Shiva has worked to keep India out of the clasp of eco-imperialism--a “mechanistic paradigm, based on industrial technologies and economies that assume limitless growth...it is the poor and other species, who, in a world of limited resources, it is the poor and other species who, in a world of limited resources, loose their share of the earth’s resources through overexploitation by the rich and powerful” (Shiva 2008, 16).

On a practical level, Shiva (1991, 215) observes: “The paradox and crisis of development arises from the mistaken [...] identification of the growth of commodity production with providing better human sustenance for all.” Shiva thus argues against one of the central tenets and practices of globalization that “bigger is better.” Still, like Gandhi, Shiva takes an internal approach to defeating a wider, broader external stress-- Shiva, too, sees a need to start with inner change, stating, “We need to change our mind before we can change our world” (Shiva, 2008, 131). Shiva sees the connection between the time of Gandhi's work for independence, and continued oppression of the current globalization process, as the “central debates at the time of independence remain the same--the question of monopolies and the stifling of societal creativity

and indigenous production” (Shiva 2001, 104). Perhaps an important distinction between Gandhi and Shiva is the imperialism of land and people (Gandhi) moving toward the imperialism of knowledge and ecological life (Shiva). This is why seed sovereignty becomes, in a way, more important than institutional sovereignty for Shiva. Still, no matter how different globalization and colonialism are in their particulars, they are fundamentally connected in terms of oppression and the stifling of the individual and the community.

Shiva understands that corporate globalization, specifically over seed and food, is a modern day form of centralized rule and dictatorship. Shiva believes that “the second very important issue [after protection of seed sovereignty] is to continue to defend the democratic right to dissent. After all what is democracy if not the right to dissent? [...] So we stand for democracy and democracy is our birthright and our duty” (Shiva, “Interview,” 2008). But what forms might dissent in a democracy take? Oftentimes democracy, in and of itself, does not hear the cries of the minority. To illustrate, the situation in India has become so dire that, in protesting globalization’s stifling of their voice and control of their resources, farmers have, as a means of dissent, taken to suicide. Figures indicate that, in 2009, “17,638 farmers committed suicide—that’s one farmer every 30 minutes” (CHRGJ 2011, 3).

The farmer suicides are political in nature. Indeed, in the western state of Maharashtra Indian farmers specifically address their suicide notes to both the Prime Minister and President, hoping that their words and actions will garner public attention and support and help fellow farmers (CHRGJ 2011, 3). Consistent with Shiva’s condemnation of economic globalization, the epidemic of farmer suicides is “concentrated in regions where chemical intensification has increased costs of production...[f]armers in these regions have become dependent on non-

renewable seeds, and monoculture cash-crops are facing a decline in prices due to globalization” (Shiva 2008, 111).

Though democracy is an important component of both Shiva’s and Gandhi’s prescription to the health of India, for example, “Democracy disciplined and enlightened is the finest thing in the world” (Gandhi, 1996, 146)-- for Shiva the matter is more complex. Simply put, Indian democracy cannot alone address the infinitely complex problems associated with globalization, economic and political. At bottom, both Shiva and Gandhi consider nonviolence as the best path for dissent, though Shiva may not have anticipated the extreme form of dissent being carried out by Indian farmers. Still, Shiva posits nonviolence as “the most important way to conduct resistance for a more just and peaceful society is to be absolutely committed to nonviolence. That was the bar of India's freedom movement” (Shiva 2008, “Interview”).

#### **IV. Looking to the Future: Conclusions and Open Paths**

As I demonstrate throughout this paper, Gandhi and Shiva both understand food to be a necessary means for political self-sufficiency. Gandhi, “the rarest of revolutionaries, representing disciplined and responsible political action,” was successful with his actions and theories, for example, with civil disobedience, despite the pressures of British colonialism (Dalton 1996, 3). Perhaps Gandhi was successful because of the landscape he was working in, for example, the British Empire’s commitment to the rule of law (as a basis for justice) allowing Gandhi an education and the ability to protest and garner the world attention for his cause.

Today, under an independent India and globalization, will the farmers’ protests be respected and heard and India be allowed to dictate their own destiny regarding food policy? Shiva provides an outlook: “The governance of the truth we stand by, the truth of the earth, the

truth of nature, the truth of justice is our greatest strength and that will only increase consciousness. From it we'll only grow with every step along the way. The next five and ten years will be absolutely unpredictable times, but as long as we can hold our ground and hope, I believe the shift of consciousness will turn today's dominators into the marginal who will be enlightened to come join our table of peaceful food and of abundant food" (Shiva 2008, "Interview").

In any case, the theories of Gandhi and Shiva provide a wide range of practical applications that may be used by others fighting for food independence. Citizens from other countries can look to the two theorists' use of non-violence, cooperation, and rejection of colonization and eco-imperialism, using food as a political tool for self-sufficiency and independence as a sound methodology. Additionally, their theories regarding "food security" may guide policymakers and promote awareness of the vital importance of food. Globalization is a brute fact. Ironically, it may be the forces of globalization, which will provide the platform and means through which food security may be more broadly understood by the world's population as a whole. This process must begin now.

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