INDIA & LITHUANIA
A Personal Bond

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The history of nations is often seen (and judged) through the prism of crucial events: those of making war and peace, of gaining or losing a territory or national independence. From this perspective, India and Lithuania are no exception. In our history books one will find ample accounts of how India and Lithuania had ruled their respective regions; how they were oppressed and dominated by foreign powers; and how they eventually reemerged as free and independent peoples to play their part in today’s global community.

There is also a history of nations engaging in trade and sharing their social and cultural influences. Here, India and Lithuania still have a long way to go. Yet, the mysterious but clearly existing link between our two languages, Sanskrit and Lithuanian, has captured our imagination for centuries. Isn’t it incredible that we still say dievas (dev) when we appeal to God, labas (lābh) when we greet each other wishing wealth and prosperity, and sapnas (sapnā) when we share our dreams and visions? The Lithuanian Language Institute has produced a dictionary containing 108 such identical words in Sanskrit and Lithuanian, and says that hundreds more could be added in future editions. It is imperative that this ancient linguistic link is supplemented with new success stories originating in the present-day business and cultural realities, so that our relationship grows deeper and stronger.

In the end, there is a history of people, famous and less known, who through their deeds have left an imprint on our historical memory. In the chronicle of Indo-Lithuanian interactions, this personal link stands out in full magnificence. People like Hermann Kallenbach, Antanas Poška and Vilhelmas Storostas-Vydūnas, have brought a deeply personal touch into our relationship; thanks to them, the Indo-Lithuanian connection has evolved intimacy rarely found in the relations of such geographically distant nations. It is to their credit that even after 50 years of Soviet occupation, India remains a source of warm feelings and moral inspiration to many Lithuanians.

This volume seeks to explore these personal connections from an academic point of view. In 2013, the Lithuanian Embassy in New Delhi organized a se-
ries of events across India, to commemorate the 110th birth anniversary of famous Lithuanian traveller, Antanas Poška. That year will definitely be marked as a turning point in Indo-Lithuanian relations. First, the Embassy’s effort provoked a genuine interest in Indian academia and resulted in numerous articles on broader aspects of the Indo-Lithuanian relationship. Most of the material published in this volume was originally presented and discussed at seminars in New Delhi and Kolkata in 2013. Second, in a remarkable gesture, the University of Calcutta decided to posthumously confer an honorary D. Litt. on Antanas Poška in 2014. And finally, in 2015, a monument to Mahatma Gandhi and Hermann Kallenbach sponsored by a Lithuania-born Indian, Dr. Yusuf K. Hamied, owner of the multi-crore brand Cipla Ltd., was unveiled in Rusnė, Western Lithuania. The Lithuanian Prime Minister and a Minister from the Government of India were among the chief guests at this top-notch event. We decided to include in this volume, an article by the distinguished Israeli scholar, Dr. Shimon Lev. To mark the unveiling of the monument, it was presented as a lecture at the old Palace of Grand Dukes of Lithuania in Vilnius in 2015.

Kallenbach (1871-1945), Vydūnas (1868-1953) and Poška (1903-1992) were contemporaries from the point of view of their legacy on Indo-Lithuanian relations. Their period of activity is largely related to the pre-World War II era. However, their impact is still felt, many years after their departure. Thus, Kallenbach was Gandhi’s best friend, his “soulmate.” The two met in South Africa in 1903 and built a relationship that continues to surprise many. Kallenbach relinquished all his riches and joined Gandhi as his most loyal lieutenant during the critical years of Gandhi’s political and spiritual formation. The “soulmates” got separated by World War I on their way to India, a wound which for Kallenbach took a very long time to heal. They rejoined only in 1937, but already with different missions in life. Gandhi was preoccupied with the nitty-gritty of India’s separation from Britain, while Kallenbach was fighting for an Independent Israel, especially in the face of an advancing Nazism in Europe. This extraordinary relationship is discussed in two remarkable articles by Anil Nauriya and Dr. Shimon Lev, respectively.

Another prominent Lithuanian, Antanas Poška, arrived in India in 1931. At that time, Lithuania was already an independent country and India was not. Poška completed two years at the University of Bombay and continued his studies at the University of Calcutta, where he mastered anthropology. Ironically, like in the case of Gandhi and Kallenbach, war again settled in and this time, separated Poška and India. Poška left Calcutta in 1937, with the goal of defending his Master thesis in London. However, that was not meant to be. The outbreak of World
War II and the subsequent geopolitical transformations in Europe, which cost Lithuania its independence, never allowed Poška to either reach London or return to India. His academic career was brutally disrupted. However, he continued writing on India extensively, and his memoirs to this day serve as an authoritative source on South Asia. In their two remarkable articles, Probal Dasgupta and Diana Mickevičienė gracefully recount Poška’s life and legacy.

Finally, the story of Lithuania’s iconic thinker, Vydūnas, is equally outstanding. Vydūnas has never visited India. However, his philosophical thought continues to surprise us with its striking similarity to the ancient Indian texts of Vedanta. Vydūnas urged his fellow Lithuanians to muster their cultural and spiritual strength in order to overcome foreign oppression. He also favored peaceful resistance to violent one; resistance based on proving and upholding one’s own values against the oppressor’s attempts to undermine them. No surprise that in his contribution to this volume, Prof. Audrius Beinorius of Vilnius University calls Vydūnas a “Lithuanian Gandhi.”

Thanks to Kallenbach, Vydūnas and Poška, Gandhian ideals were never foreign to the Lithuanian psyche. Indeed, they have become deeply ingrained in it. For most Lithuanians, the idea of non-violence has always had a personal connotation, just like Gandhi and India. Maybe, that is the reason why Lithuania’s resistance to foreign oppression has always been predominantly peaceful. Two authors, Govardhan and Daiva Tamošaitytė, analyze the roots and the depths of this phenomenon and offer somewhat differing conclusions.

The Embassy would like to express its profound gratitude to the authors and contributors of this volume, who have lent their patience, stamina and goodwill while preparing this much awaited book for publication. Special thanks go to Messrs. Arvind Sukhani and Kiron Shah, Lithuania’s Honorary Consuls in Kolkata and Bengaluru, respectively, for their important contribution. And of course, our infinite gratitude to the Embassy’s staff, past and present, who conceived the idea of this volume and helped realize it.

New Delhi, October 2016
Hermann Kallenbach, Sonja Schlesin:
Glimpses of Some Lithuanian and East European
Links in Gandhi’s South African Struggles and After

By Anil Nauriya
Advocate, Supreme Court of India

Hermann Kallenbach (1871–1945) is of enduring importance in the life of Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948). He was one of the key European figures who assisted Gandhi in his activities and struggles in South Africa till the beginning of the First World War in 1914. Born in the East Prussia-Lithuania border region, he was raised in Russ (now Rusnė), a border town in the Šilutė district of Lithuania. He studied architecture in Stuttgart in Germany and then, in 1896, moved to South Africa to join two of his uncles, Henry and Simon Sacke, who were settled in Johannesburg.1 There it was that Kallenbach set up practice as an architect. It is there that Kallenbach met Gandhi. The attorney, Rahim Karim Khan, introduced them in 1903. Their correspondence reveals the innermost thoughts of Gandhi at crucial periods in his life. Gandhi’s first written reference to Kallenbach appears to have been in a letter written from Johannesburg to Omar Haji Amod Zaveri in 1905.2 The reference suggests a familiarity on the part of both Gandhi and his addressee with Kallenbach, indicating that the acquaintance went back even further.

Gandhi established his law office in Johannesburg in early 1903. His secretarial needs were earlier attended to by a Miss Dick who left after she got married. Thereafter, Kallenbach introduced Sonja Schlesin (1888–1956) to Gandhi; she would play an important role in his law office and in the South African Indian struggle. Sonja was a niece of Viktor Rosenberg, who belonged to the same town as Kallenbach, a town now in Lithuania.3 Though Sonja herself was born in Moscow, her father, Isidor Schlesin, was born in Plunge, earlier known as Plungian or Plungyan, a small town in Western Lithuania.4

More than two million Jews had left Russian empire territories between 1881 and 1917 and of these about 40,000, mainly from Lithuania, had moved to

3 George Paxton, Sonja Schlesin, p. 4. The name of this town is given by Paxton as Neustadt. But this is apparently a common name and many towns in the region have areas known as “Neustadt”, or “New Town”.
4 George Paxton, Sonja Schlesin, p. 4.
South Africa. It appears that most of the Jews who migrated to South Africa were of Lithuanian “stock.” This is how both Kallenbach’s and Sonja Schlesin’s families came to be in South Africa at the dawn of the 20th century. It has been suggested that Kallenbach had known the young Sonja in Lithuania.

Introducing Sonja to Gandhi, Kallenbach said: “This girl has been entrusted to me by her mother, but she is very mischievous and impetuous. Perhaps, she is even insolent. You keep her if you can manage her. I do not place her with you for the mere pay.”

When legal restrictions on Indians were enhanced in the Transvaal in 1906–7, Kallenbach wrote in support of Indians in the Johannesburg press. Gandhi cited him, saying: “What Mr. Kallenbach writes is quite true: that is, if we submit to such a law, we deserve it.”

Particularly from 1908 onwards Kallenbach assisted Gandhi in the struggles led by him. Kallenbach visited the settlement in Phoenix and also hosted Gandhi in “The Kraal”, a cottage he owned in Orchards, Johannesburg. In an undated letter, possibly written around this time, Gandhi refers to the food that he and Kallenbach shared at Orchards, saying that Kallenbach need not “fear the food” at Phoenix as “it is most like what we have at Orchards.”

It is also on Kallenbach’s property in Johannesburg that Gandhi got the Indian statesman, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, to stay during his visit there in October / November 1912.

Kallenbach’s involvement in the Indian struggle in South Africa was total. On 10 November 1913, Kallenbach was himself arrested at the Charlestown railway station on the Natal-Transvaal border for his participation in the Gandhi-led passive resistance campaign.

It is again Gandhi’s associates, Lewis Walter Ritch and Hermann Kallenbach, who reinforced Gandhi in his outreach to Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910), who had figured in Gandhi’s writings as early as in 1893–4. In South Africa, Gandhi had, in 1905, written an article on the life and work of Tolstoy. In this article, he noted Tolstoy’s critique of war and observed: “Though himself a Russian, he

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6 Gideon Shimoni, *Gandhi, Satyagraha and the Jews.....*, p. 7; see also Margaret Chatterjee, *Gandhi and his Jewish Friends*, p. 25.
7 Shimon Lev, *Soulmates*, p. 6
has written many strong and bitter things against Russia concerning the Russo-Japanese War. He has addressed a very pungent and effective letter to the Czar in regard to the war.”

Kallenbach too was an admirer of Tolstoy and a few years later both Gandhi and Kallenbach were in correspondence with the Russian writer. While Gandhi was visiting England in 1909, he addressed a letter to Tolstoy, inter alia, bringing to his notice the ongoing passive resistance struggle in the Transvaal and seeking his permission to print copies, with some modifications, of a letter that Tolstoy had written to an Indian, the chief editor of *Free Hindustan*, a journal issued from Vancouver in Canada. Tolstoy replied to Gandhi promptly – in less than a week – and granted the request. Around the same time L. W. Ritch too appears to have made contact with Tolstoy. A few days later Gandhi, still in London, sent Tolstoy a copy of the book that Joseph J. Doke had written “in connection with my life, in so far as it has a bearing on the struggle with which I am so connected and to which my life is dedicated.” There followed another letter from Gandhi to Tolstoy in April 1910. To this Tolstoy replied on 8 May acknowledging receipt of Gandhi’s book “Indian Home Rule” and expressing his appreciation of Gandhi’s work.

It was around this time, at the end of May 1910, that Kallenbach offered to Gandhi “the use of my farm near Lawley for passive resisters and their indigent families... free of any rent or charge, as long as the struggle with the Transvaal Government lasts.” It was at this juncture that the 1,100 acre farm near Lawley Station, 22 miles from Johannesburg, was named after the Russian writer. Kallenbach, Gandhi and two of his sons settled there from 4 June. Other families followed. Meanwhile, Kallenbach wrote to Tolstoy: “Without asking your permission, I have named my Farm, ‘Tolstoy Farm’... Having made use of your name, I thought I owe you this explanation, and may I add, in justification of hav-

15 Gandhi to Tolstoy, 1 October 1909, CWMG, Vol 9, pp. 444–6.
16 Tolstoy to Gandhi, 7 October 1909, CWMG, Vol 9, Appendix XXVII, p. 593.
17 A letter from Tolstoy to L. W. Ritch, in reply to the latter’s, was published in the *Daily News* and summarized in *Indian Opinion*, 30 October 1909, CWMG, Vol 9, pp. 448–450, including p. 449 n 2; see also Margaret Chatterjee, *Gandhi and his Jewish Friends*, p.40 and p. 67 n 4. Tolstoy’s secretary had been arrested, leading Ritch to write to Tolstoy in solidarity. Chatterjee at p. 40 writes: “Ritch wrote to Gandhi after the arrest and published his reply in *The Daily News*.” This is obviously a slip for “Ritch wrote to Tolstoy after the arrest...”
18 Gandhi to Tolstoy, 10 November 1909, CWMG, Vol 9, pp. 528–9.
20 Tolstoy to Gandhi, 8 May 1910, CWMG, Vol 10, Appendix III, p. 505.
23 Idem.
"Mr. Kallenbach has written to you about Tolstoy Farm. Mr. Kallenbach and I have been friends for many years. I may state that he has gone through most of the experiences that you have so graphically described in your work, My Confessions. No writings have so deeply touched Mr. Kallenbach as yours; and, as a spur to further effort in living up to the ideals held before the world by you, he has taken the liberty, after consultation with me, of naming his farm after you. Of his generous action in giving the use of the farm for passive resisters, the numbers of Indian Opinion I am sending herewith will give you full information."

To this Tolstoy replied at considerable length on 7 September 1910. Tolstoy passed away on 20 November 1910, around the time when his reply arrived in South Africa. The obituary by Gandhi in his journal, which also published Tolstoy’s photograph, concluded with the words: “It is no small encouragement to us that we have the blessings of a great man like Tolstoy in our task.” Gandhi and Kallenbach were in touch also with V. Chertkov, Tolstoy’s close friend, and Mrs. Fyvie Mayo of Glasgow, a journalist and translator of Tolstoy.

As the passive resistance progressed, there were talks in Cape Town with Jan Smuts, then Minister for the Interior; the “purport of the conversation” was summarized by Gandhi in a letter understood to be addressed to Sonja Schlesin and intended to be shared with “those on the Farm.” Kallenbach’s closeness to Gandhi may be seen from the fact that when Gandhi’s eldest son, Harilal, who had also been a passive resister, left him in 1911 and went off to Mozambique in order to prepare to return to India, Kallenbach is understood to have played a role in persuading him to come back to his parents. It has been suggested that

26 Tolstoy to Gandhi, 7 September 1910, CWMG, Vol 10, Appendix VI (ii), pp. 512–4. An English translation was published by Indian Opinion on 26 November 1910, six days after Tolstoy’s death.
when Harilal was located in Mozambique, where he had gone en route to India, it was Kallenbach who went to Mozambique to bring Harilal back. Gandhi shared with Kallenbach some of the conversations and even sharp disagreements he had with his wife, Kasturba.

At the end of July 1911, Kallenbach left on a six-month long visit to Europe. He was seen off very warmly by the Indian passive resisters and gratefully presented with a public address while Indian Opinion published his portrait as a supplement. Gandhi published a long account of the farewell to Kallenbach in Johannesburg, in which the representatives of the Chinese community had also participated. A change had meanwhile occurred in Kallenbach’s own lifestyle which Gandhi records as follows:

“At the station there was a representative gathering of Indians besides his European friends to see Mr. Kallenbach off. In order to gain experience and still further to simplify his life and to discipline himself, Mr. Kallenbach traveled 3rd class by the train, much to the surprise of his many friends... Mr. Kallenbach is traveling 3rd class on the steamer also. All the settlers on Tolstoy Farm were at Lawley station to see Mr. Kallenbach off.”

In addition to the passive resisters settled on the Tolstoy Farm established by Gandhi and Kallenbach, there is a reference in the Gandhi-Kallenbach correspondence also to a few Africans living in and/or adjoining the farm. Gandhi had recorded that he himself had been working at “stone-rolling” side by side with the Africans at Tolstoy Farm. The relation with the African family on the farm was quite close and based on mutual trust. On one occasion Gandhi wrote to Kallenbach: “The native John’s daughter has given birth to a child. I have been medically consulted as to the after-birth.” But, Gandhi writes, the child died at the end of September. Later Gandhi remarked to Kallenbach that the Africans on the farm should “feel that here they may depend upon the fairest treatment. And I have no doubt that if it proceeds from

34 Gandhi to Kallenbach, 20 August 1911, Letter, CWMG, Vol 96, p. 69.
the heart and is uniform, continuous and not from affectation, it will bless both the parties.”

Also, it was on Tolstoy Farm that the outstanding African leader and lawyer Pixley Seme, credited with being the prime initiator in the foundation of the African National Congress (then South African Native National Congress), met Gandhi in the presence of Kallenbach in 1911. An account of this historic meeting, in which Kallenbach figures, has become available from the memoirs of Dr. Pauline Podlashuk, a future medical doctor who was active in the suffragette movement in South Africa as secretary of the Women’s Enfranchisement League. It was Dr. Podlashuk who had earlier translated one of Tolstoy’s Russian language letters addressed to Gandhi in 1910. Present at the Gandhi-Seme meeting in 1911, her account is specific. Pauline Podlashuk, accompanied by Miss Stewart Sanderson, who was then Joint Secretary of the Women’s Enfranchisement League, was received by Kallenbach at Lawley railway station near Tolstoy Farm. The two women then waited for Kallenbach to receive another guest arriving by the same train. That was Pixley Seme. She writes that the party, including Pixley Seme, met Gandhi in his library, “a large room lined with shelves full of books,” where “Mr. Gandhi told Dr. Seme about his passive resistance movement and how he had settled the women and children on the farm.”

The party was shown around the farm, the workshops “where the boys were learning shoe-making and tailoring and the women, basket-making.” Gandhi and Kallenbach were to speak in Johannesburg that evening and they all took the train back to town. The train had started pulling out when Kallenbach ran to the stationmaster who signaled it to stop. Dr. Podlashuk recalled: “Naturally, all the passengers looked out of the windows to see what was happening and they saw a most curious sight for South Africa. Coming toward the train were four


40 That the translation from the original Russian was by Pauline Padlashuk is acknowledged in CWMG, Vol 10, p. 370n and p. 512n. The translation was published in Indian Opinion, 26 November 1910. See also Indian Opinion, Golden Number, 1914, pp. 18–9, reproducing Tolstoy’s letter to Gandhi and the note in parenthesis: “Translated from the original Russian by Pauline Padlashuk, Johannesburg, November 15, 1910.”

41 The information about Gandhi and Kallenbach having to attend a Johannesburg function in the evening helps narrow down the probable dates of the Gandhi-Pixley Seme meeting at Tolstoy Farm. Kallenbach left for a six-month tour of Europe on 31 July 1911. Before this date in 1911 there were events in Johannesburg on 29 April, 1 May, 2 May and 9 June at which both Gandhi and Kallenbach were present and expected to speak or likely to have been present, whether or not either of them made a speech.
dark men, three who looked like Indians – Kallenbach looked like one too – and a
Native. With them were two young white girls. The train stopped and our party went
into a first class carriage which carried the sign ‘Reserved’. I did not know then that this
sign meant that the carriage was reserved for Non-Europeans.”

Of the Phoenix settlement established by Gandhi near Durban, Kallenbach
would become a trustee in 1912 and remain so till the end. The Indian states-
man, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, visited South Africa at Gandhi’s suggestion in
October–November 1912. Gandhi and Kallenbach were then living on Tolstoy
Farm; to receive Gokhale, Kallenbach traveled to Cape Town along with Gan-
dhi, Imam Bawazeer and Ahmed Cachalia, the Chairman of the British Indian
Association.42 Gokhale was then brought by train to Johannesburg where the
railway station was decorated in honor of the guest; the “culminating point of
the decorations was the large arch of welcome which rose at the...entrance... (i)ts
design the work of...Kallenbach, the well-known architect...”43

Kallenbach acted as secretary of the European Committee which organized
a reception for Gokhale.44 Kallenbach, along with Gandhi’s early biographer,
Rev. J. J. Doke, Rev. Phillips and L. W. Ritch, another close associate of Gan-
dhi and the “Chief Volunteer” during Gokhale’s stay in Johannesburg, were
present too when the Transvaal Indian Women’s Association gave a reception
g to Gokhale.45

During his visit to the Transvaal, Gokhale spent a few days in Kallenbach’s
house in Johannesburg and between 2 and 5 November 1912 – on Tolstoy
Farm.46 The draft of a speech that Gokhale delivered at a banquet given in his
honor in Johannesburg was discussed at least 3 times with both Gandhi and
Kallenbach.47

Kallenbach accompanied Gokhale and Gandhi on other legs of the tour. In
Durban a public banquet was given to Gokhale; Gandhi, as the main organizer
of the tour, was of course present along with Kallenbach; so were John Dube, the
first President of the African National Congress (then known as the South Af-

43 Indian Opinion Souvenir of the Hon. Gopal Krishna Gokhale’s Tour in South Africa, October 22nd – Novem-
ber 18th (1912), p. 13.
44 Indian Opinion Souvenir of the Hon. Gopal Krishna Gokhale’s Tour in South Africa, October 22nd – Novem-
ber 18th (1912), p. 16.
45 Indian Opinion Souvenir of the Hon. Gopal Krishna Gokhale’s Tour in South Africa, October 22nd – November 18th
(1912), p. 22.
46 Diary, 1912, CWMG, Vol 11, p. 412.
47 Ramdas Gandhi, Sansmran, p. 54.
rican Native National Congress), which had been founded earlier in the year in January, and his brother Charles Dube, another founding member of the ANC, who also looked after John Dube’s journal, *Ilanga lase Natal.* At the conclusion of Gokhale’s visit on 17 November, Gandhi and Kallenbach saw him off on his return journey to India, accompanying him to Mozambique’s Delagoa Bay-Lourenco Marques (present-day Maputo), Inhambane, Beira and Mozambique city, Zanzibar and Tanga. In Beira, Gokhale’s party spent some time between 20 and 23 November and in Mozambique City a few hours on 25 November but enough to be able to address meetings at both places, including a rickshaw ride at the latter. It was only at Tanga in north Tanganyika, beyond Zanzibar, that Kallenbach and Gandhi parted company with Gokhale.

On their way back, Gandhi and Kallenbach spent nearly the whole of the first week of December in Dar-es-Salaam (Tanganyika) before returning to South Africa via Mozambique city, Chinde, Beira, and Delagoa Bay-Lourenco Marques. Kallenbach was witness to Gandhi’s brief detention on their return journey when the Delagoa Bay Immigration Officer on 13 December 1912 declined a permit to Gandhi on the ground that he was an Indian.

In the *satyagraha* struggle in South Africa in 1913, Kallenbach participated in the Gandhi-led Great March, was arrested on 10 November at Charlestown and sentenced as a *satyagrahi* to three months’ imprisonment; he was incarcerated in Volksrust prison but released before the expiry of the full term, pursuant to the agreement between Gandhi and Jan Smuts. On 17 October 1913, Gandhi had visited the Natal Coalfields near Newcastle and “urged indentured Indians to strike until Government promised repeal of ₤3 tax.” On 23 October, Gandhi had informed the Press from Newcastle: “We are advising the strikers to leave the mines and court arrest, and failing arrest, to march to Volksrust.” Of the mine-owners, Gandhi wrote to Kallenbach: “They threatened, they flattered, they tried everything to wean us from the strike. But it could not be done.”

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49 CWMG, Vol 11, p. 358.
54 *Indian Opinion,* 29 October 1913, CWMG, Vol 12, p. 248.
Of this struggle, Gandhi wrote:

“At one time nearly 30,000 men were on strike. The Government and the planters tried every means to bend the strikers, but without avail. They had but one purpose in life: these strikers refused to be left alone. They wanted to fill the prisons. After due notice to the Government, nearly 2,000 of them, men, women and children, marched into the Transvaal. They had no legal right to cross the border; their destination was Tolstoy Farm, established by Mr. Kallenbach for Passive Resistors, the distance to be covered was 150 miles. No army ever marched with so little burden. No wagons or mules accompanied the party. Each one carried his own blankets and daily rations, consisting of one pound of bread and one ounce of sugar. This meager ration was supplemented by what Indian merchants gave them on their way. The Government imprisoned the leaders, i.e., those whom they thought were leaders. But they soon found that all were leaders. So when they were nearly within reach of their destination, the whole party was arrested. Thus their object (to get arrested) was accomplished.”

When Gandhi’s wife, Kasturba, and other Indian women who had been imprisoned, were released from Pietermaritzburg prison on 22 December 1913, Gandhi, who had been just released from Bloemfontein prison, and Kallenbach, among others, were present to receive them. When Gandhi and Kasturba left South Africa in July 1914 to return home to India via England, Kallenbach accompanied him on the voyage. The First World War broke out even as they reached England, and Kallenbach was, by the following year, imprisoned as an alien in the UK’s Isle of Man.

Gandhi’s reliance on and faith in Kallenbach made him continue to mull over the possibility of Kallenbach joining him in India. Some of Kallenbach’s belongings were taken by Gandhi from England to India in this expectation. For example, we know that a few months later, some of Kallenbach’s books were with Gandhi in Ahmedabad in Western India, where he had set up a settlement; in September 1915, he lent some of them to William Winstanley Pearson who, along with C. F. Andrews, was then on his way to Fiji to carry out an investigation into the Indian indentured labor conditions there.

On his sea voyage home to India, in December 1914 – January 1915 and even after reaching India, Gandhi continued writing to Kallenbach from wherever he

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57 Arun Gandhi, Kasturba: A Life, p. 183.
was, on the ship, on the train, from Rajkot, Bombay, Tagore’s Shantiniketan near Bolpur in Bengal, from Poona, Calcutta, from Rangoon in Burma, on his way to Madras (now Chennai) in the South, Ahmedabad, from Motihari in Champaran in Bihar, from Bardoli, Simla, from prison in West India (Yeravda Central pris-
on, Poona), and from Wardha. A few months after returning to India, Gandhi spoke at a conference in Poona (now Pune) where he paid tribute to the Indian statesman Gopal Krishna Gokhale, who had passed away on 19 February earlier in the year; in this speech Gandhi remarked also on Kallenbach, saying that “no purer-minded person today walks the earth in Europe than Mr. Kallenbach.”

At a time when the World War was on and Germany was seen as an enemy by the Government in Britain and, by extension, in British India, Gandhi chose to stress Kallenbach’s German status, to make the point that “all Germans are not fiends.”

Four months earlier, Gandhi had written to Kallenbach on Gopal Krishna Gokhale’s death: “Well, I am without a helmsman... He lives in the spirit and his spirit is enthroned in my heart.” In this letter, Gandhi told Kallenbach: “You will be surprised that Mrs. Gandhi has developed a passion for you. She thinks of you at every turn. She thinks that our life is incomplete without you. This is... how it is happening with her just now.”

Soon after his return to India, Gandhi established an ashram (settlement) at Kochrab near Ahmedabad on 20 May 1915. A week earlier, on 13 May 1915, he wrote to Kallenbach about having brought with him from Madras a little boy named Naicker, who was the son of Mrs. Selvan, a widow he had known in Natal; in a letter to Albert West earlier in May, Gandhi mentioned having taken charge of Naicker, who he described in a letter written obviously to a co-worker in Ahmedabad as “the little one who used to be naughty in Phoenix.” At this stage Gandhi does not appear to have said more to Kallenbach about the social background of young Naicker. Yet this was both a continuation of an aspect of Gandhi’s activity begun in South Africa and the soft beginning of certain specifically Indian aspects of a process that was to have a momentous impact on Gandhi’s life in India.

Four months after bringing Naicker with him, Gandhi included among the inmates of the settlement a man named Dudabhai Malji Dafda, belonging to the

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62 Idem.
64 Gandhi to Kallenbach, 13 May 1915, CWMG, Vol 96 (Suppl. Vol 6), p. 212; Gandhi to A. H. West, 4 May 1915, CWMG, Vol 13, p. 72 and p. 76.
so-called “untouchable” classes, a category described at various times by a variety of names, including Pariahs, Harijans or Dalits; Dafda’s family, that is, Danibai, Dudabhai’s wife, and baby daughter Lakshimi too followed within a few days. Gandhi was conscious of the socially revolutionary nature of his step; it is to Kallenbach, then in detention as an enemy alien in the United Kingdom’s Isle of Man, that Gandhi confided: “Greater work than passive resistance has commenced. I have taken in the Ashram a Pariah from these parts. This is an extreme step. It has caused a breach between Mrs. Gandhi and myself. I lost my temper… Many further developments will take place and I may become a deserted man.”

A week later Gandhi again shared his thoughts on the matter with Kallenbach:

“... You know what a Pariah is. He is what is called an untouchable. The widow’s son whom I have taken is a Pariah but that did not shock Mrs. Gandhi so much. Now I have taken one from our own parts and Mrs. Gandhi and also Maganlal’s wife were up in arms against me. They made my life miserable so far as they could. I told them they were not bound to stay with me. This irritated them the more. The storm has not yet subsided. I am however unmoved and comparatively calm. The step I have taken means a great deal. It may alter my life a bit, i.e., I may have to completely take up Pariah work, i.e., I might have to become a Pariah myself… Anyway, let my troubles brace you up if they can.”

The ‘Pariah’ matter continued to be a topic in many subsequent letters from Gandhi to Kallenbach. Young Naiker’s brother and their mother, Mrs. Selvan, came over to the settlement in the following month. According to Gandhi’s third son, Ramdas, who was one of the inmates on the settlement, the introduction of Dudabhai’s family into the ashram led to some donors turning away and Gandhi’s elder sister, Raliatbehn, leaving the settlement. Raliatbehn was empathetic to Gandhi’s social approach and had been prepared to live on the settlement along with the Dalit-Harijan family but was evidently not able to bring herself to inter-dine with it, something Gandhi appears to have insisted on enforcing in practice.
From India Gandhi wrote also to Sonja Schlesin and on receiving her letter after a long time, replied most affectionately; addressing her as “my dear daughter,” he discussed various matters and referred also to Thambi Naidoo, his old much-valued associate in South Africa: “I would certainly feel delighted if Thambi came.”

Gandhi would also write to Kallenbach about his travels within India. In a letter to Kallenbach in 1916, Gandhi wrote:

“During the travels just completed, I went to a place called Dehradun. It is at the base of the Himalayas. You will love the place. The air is bracing and there are so many walks to the Himalayan hills.”

There seems to have even been some discussion between Gandhi and Kallenbach on moving to Dehradun, even if temporarily, for a few months. Later Gandhi wrote to him: “Of shifting to Dehradun or elsewhere, only when you are here.” Their correspondence at this time, which is available from Gandhi’s side, continued through 1916 till Gandhi’s letter of 17 April 1917, which he writes to Kallenbach from Motihari: “I am on one of the loveliest spots of the earth – very near the Himalayas...” It was a time of crisis. Gandhi had taken up the peasants’ cause in the Champaran district of the eastern province of Bihar and had been asked by the British authorities to leave the area, which he had refused to do, and he was therefore “to be tried for contempt.” About this time, Gandhi gave instructions to his nephew Maganlal that Kallenbach was to be posted with all the news at the detention camp in the Isle of Man. A few days later, Gandhi wrote to another correspondent, who was apparently in England, with messages to be conveyed personally to Kallenbach, and offering also to bear the expenses of the journey, presumably to the Isle of Man.

Essentially, Gandhi felt the need for both Kallenbach and Sonja in India. He had been encouraging the establishment of national schools and in his discus-

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76 Idem.
77 Gandhi to Maganlal, 16 April 1917, CWMG, Vol 13, pp. 365–6.
sions with the teaching staff of the National School in Ahmedabad, in Western India, Gandhi said:

“English should be an optional subject. One should know good, at any rate correct, English. It would be excellent if we could get an English teacher for the purpose, but I can think of no one at present except Miss Schlesin. If only she would come, we could want nothing better. She is a very capable person.” 79

In August 1917, Gandhi wrote from Ahmedabad to his third son Ramdas, then in South Africa: “Tell Miss Schlesin to write to me. I am awaiting her arrival. Tell her also that there are some ten letters from me she has not answered.” 80

Gandhi’s letters to Kallenbach and Sonja Schlesin are significant because in these he tends to touch both on his South African experiences and ruminate on his activities after returning to India. There are recollections about his South African companions and reflections about his experiences in India. Sonja Schlesin and Gandhi seem to have considered the possibility of her going to live in Phoenix. In 1918, he wrote to her: “Of course, Phoenix is not going to be sold. You can have five acres of ground in the centre. I like your dream specially as it includes a visit to India.” 81 He wanted her to keep in touch with his second and third sons, Manilal and Ramdas, then in South Africa: “Ramdas is a visionary... I hope you will guide him, and befriend him. I wish you could live with Manilal for a while. You could carry on your studies there.” 82 “My life has become very complex,” Gandhi informs Sonja, while briefing her about his activities in India. 83 About his wife Kasturba, regarding whose resistance to some social reform measures Gandhi had written to Kallenbach three years earlier, he now wrote: “Mrs. Gandhi has developed remarkably. She has beautifully resigned herself to things she used to fight.” 84

The year 1919 was a major turning point in India. Events had been moving to a head. Since February 1919 Gandhi had been speaking of a civil resistance campaign (satyagraha) over the draconian Rowlatt Bills which involved a severe restriction on civil liberties; a Satyagraha Pledge was signed by Gandhi and

79 Talk with Teachers of the National School, 23 June 1917, CWMG, Vol 13, pp. 446–8.
82 Idem.
83 Idem.
84 Idem.
others on 24 February 1919, indicating that the proposed legislation, if signed into law along with other laws to be specified, would face civil disobedience. One of the Bills, which became the Anarchical and Revolutionary Crimes Act, 1919, received the Governor-General’s assent on 21 March 1919. The decision to observe a hartal on 6 April was announced on 23 March. The hartal in India on 6 April 1919 had a high degree of success. Subsequent events, including the massacre by British-led troops at Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar, on 13 April 1919, indicated that the Indian protests of the preceding fortnight had had the effect of unnerving the colonial administration. This incident in which even according to official figures nearly four hundred unarmed civilians were shot dead in an enclosed park, galvanized Indian nationalist opinion still further.

In the midst of these events, Gandhi wrote calmly to Sonja Schlesin on the day before he signed the Satyagraha pledge to protest the legislation:

“Passive resistance is on the topics regarding certain legislation that the Government of India are passing through the Council. The war council meets tomorrow at the Ashram. You may depend upon it that it won’t be a bad copy of similar councils in which you were both an actor (or actress?) and a fairly intelligent spectatress. You won’t therefore need from me a description of the council meeting.”

A few weeks later, after the massacre in Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar, and the enforcement of martial law throughout the Punjab, Gandhi wrote to Sonja again, this time to congratulate her on her having passed the teacher’s examination with distinction, adding:

“Satyagraha is going on merrily. Civil disobedience is expected to commence very soon. How I often wish you were here for more reasons than one! But I must plough the lonely furrow. It often makes me sad when I think of all my helpers of South Africa. I have no Doke here. I have no Kallenbach. Don’t know where he is at the present moment. Polak in England. No counterpart of Kachalia or Sorabji. Impossible to get the second edition of Rustomji. Strange as it may appear, I feel lonelier here than in South Africa. This does not mean that I am without co-workers. But between the majority of them and me, there is not that perfect correspondence which used to exist

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in South Africa. I do not enjoy the same sense of security which you all gave me there. I do not know the people here; nor they, me. This is all gloomy, if I were to brood over it. But I do not. I have not the time for it. I have a few moments of leisure just now. Rama-
das’ letter reminds me of your existence in South Africa, and I am giving myself the momentary pleasure of sharing my innermost thoughts with you. But now no more.”

In the three years from April 1917 to August 1920, perhaps on account of the climax of the Great War and its disruptive aftermath, Gandhi appears to have received little news of Kallenbach. This clearly troubled him and he made frantic efforts to locate his old friend. Gandhi finally succeeded in locating Kallenbach in Berlin or in East Prussia by August 1920. Kallenbach appears to have been visiting his family. Thus, contact between them was re-established just after Gandhi had launched his massive non-cooperation movement against British rule in India. A letter Gandhi wrote to Kallenbach ten days after launching this movement, on 10 August 1920, indicates some of the efforts he must have made to obtain news of Kallenbach:

“My dear Lower House,

After how long a time have I the good fortune to write to you? After the greatest search, I have now got your address. Never has a day passed but I have thought of you. The first information imparted to me about you was by a lady in Johannesburg. Miss Winterbottom and Polak could tell me nothing. P. K. Naidu could tell me nothing. Dr. Mehta sent me a cable to give me your address. I have also a letter from Jamnadas whom I have asked to see you in Berlin if you could at all be seen. Jamnadas tells me either he or Dr. Mehta will try to see you. How I wish I could go over to see you and hug you. For me you have risen from the dead. I had taken it for granted that you were dead. I could not believe that you would keep me without a letter for so long. The alternative was that you had written but your letters were not delivered to me at all. I wrote to your camp but there was no reply...

Upper House”

Another letter from Gandhi to Kallenbach a few days later refers to a message from Kallenbach received through Jamnadas (a relation of Gandhi’s), inviting

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Gandhi to visit Germany.\footnote{Gandhi to Kallenbach, 27 August 1920, CWMG, Vol 96 (Suppl. Vol 6), pp. 275–6.} Obviously, Kallenbach was yet unaware of the scale of the movement just launched by Gandhi in India.

It is noteworthy that Gandhi would remember Kallenbach at crucial junctures in his post-African life in India. He had written to Kallenbach from Motihari at a critical point in the Champaran peasant struggle in 1917. He had written to him also at the start of the non-cooperation movement in August 1920. In the following year, when he was in the thick of this movement, Gandhi inquired again from his son Ramdas in South Africa about Kallenbach and Sonja Schlesin:

"Do you meet Mr. Kallenbach? He may be writing to you. I remember Miss Schlesin every day. I believe you have not forgotten her. You should meet her even if you have to make a search for her. Her public service is such that it is never to be forgotten."\footnote{Gandhi to Ramdas, September 1921, CWMG, Vol 95 (Suppl. Vol 5), p. 31.}

And just before his arrest in India in the course of the non-cooperation movement, Gandhi wrote to Kallenbach:

"Ramdas is now my companion and nurse. Devdas is attending to important work in another province. He has shaped wonderfully. Harilal is in prison. I am expecting to be deported. Even execution has been suggested. It sounds all funny... How nice it would be when you can come and work side by side as of yore."\footnote{Gandhi to Kallenbach, 8 February 1922, CWMG, Vol 96 (Suppl. Vol 6), p. 279.}

Gandhi would be imprisoned shortly and released only in 1924. After his release too, Gandhi would sometimes rely on Kallenbach for materials on old acquaintances. In 1926, he wrote to Kallenbach asking him “to procure for me two copies of a book written by Teo Schreiner giving an account of Olive Schreiner.”\footnote{Gandhi to Kallenbach, 29 July 1926, CWMG, Vol 31, p. 224.}

Olive Schreiner, who Gandhi had much admired for her work in confronting racism in South Africa, had passed away in December 1920. The books arrived and were acknowledged along with a personal missive about Gandhi’s son Manilal: “Manilal is to be married on 5\textsuperscript{th} March. He will take his wife with him. You will look after both please.”\footnote{Gandhi to Kallenbach, 16 February 1927, CWMG, Vol 96 (Suppl. Vol 6), p. 280.}

At the height of the agitation in India against the Simon Commission in 1928, Gandhi wrote to his son and daughter-in-law in South Africa and concluded
the letter with the sentence: “Tell Mr. Kallenbach that I am waiting for him to come.”96 A few weeks before he launched the civil disobedience movement in India and the famous salt march, he wrote to Sonja Schlesin, who had referred to some errors in Gandhi’s works, to urge her to come to India “in time to correct the many inaccuracies you have discovered in the volumes”; accurately anticipating that he would soon be imprisoned, Gandhi added: “It is highly likely that when your long leave is on I may be in one of the king’s hotels.”97

Gandhi was arrested in May and released only towards the end of January in the following year. When there was the prospect of Gandhi visiting England for the Round Table Conference of 1931 to discuss further constitutional advance in India, Sonja later seems to have inquired also about the possibility of Gandhi visiting South Africa; Gandhi wrote back saying that was unlikely and invited her once again to point out the errors in his reminiscences.98

Yet again, at the time of his fast on the untouchability question, Gandhi wrote on 18 September 1932, what was in part a farewell letter to Kallenbach, using their mutual modes of address:

“My dear Lower House,
If I go, I shall go in the hope that you will one day fulfil the hope you and I have long cherished of you... If God has more work to take from this body, it will survive the fiery ordeal. Then you must try some early day to come and meet. Otherwise good bye and much love from,

Upper House.”99

Gandhi’s second son, Manilal Gandhi and his wife Sushila had stayed back in South Africa where Manilal looked after Indian Opinion. In 1934, Gandhi was on a nationwide tour to campaign against the practice of untouchability. At this time, Sonja Schlesin wrote from South Africa to the Mahatma complaining about an article that had appeared in Indian Opinion. Though in the midst of a rather hectic schedule in south and east India, Gandhi took time out to write to Manilal holding Sonja’s complaint to be justified.100 One hint of what Gandhi was going through during this period emerges from the last line of the second letter: “You must have read about my narrow escape”.

99 CWMG, Vol 51, p. 455.
The reference was to an incident in late April in Jashidih in Bihar in which Gandhi’s car was stoned by orthodox elements opposed to the campaign for social reform.\textsuperscript{101}

The First World War, and Kallenbach’s detention in England, had separated the two friends. When they finally met again twenty-three years later, clouds had started to gather over the horizon for the onset of yet another world war. Kallenbach visited India in 1937 and 1939 and on both occasions spent time with Gandhi. Between these visits, Kallenbach’s niece, Hanna Lazar (1897–1987), came to India in 1938 and also met Gandhi. The timing of Kallenbach’s visit was related in large part to international Jewish concerns with which Kallenbach had over the years become actively involved.

At an important educational conference held in India in October 1937, Gandhi would recall Kallenbach’s contribution to his own emphasis on manual or vocational training. A third person report in Gandhi’s journal, \textit{Harijan}, gave this account of his reference to such training:

\textit{“He had some experience of it having trained his own sons and the children on the Tolstoy Farm in South Africa, belonging to all castes and creeds, who were good, bad and indifferent, through some manual training, e. g., carpentry or shoe-making which he had learnt from Kallenbach who had training in a Trappist monastery.”}\textsuperscript{102}

The monastery referred to is at Mariannhill, not far from Durban. Gandhi himself had visited it in 1895. Later, Kallenbach too would go there as both he and Gandhi decided that though wearing of shoes needed to be avoided, protection was required against “thorns, stones and the like” on Tolstoy Farm:\textsuperscript{103}

\textit{“We therefore determined to make sandals. There is at Mariannhill, near Pinetown, a monastery of German Catholic monks called Trappists, where industries of this nature are carried on. Mr. Kallenbach went there and acquired the art of making sandals. After he returned, he taught it to me and I in turn to other workers. Thus several young men learnt how to manufacture sandals, and we commenced selling them to friends.”}\textsuperscript{104}

\textsuperscript{102} Harijan, 30 October 1937, CWMG, Vol 66, p. 263.
\textsuperscript{103} Kalidas Nag, \textit{Tolstoy and Gandhi}, p. 107, Gandhi’s writing on Tolstoy Farm.
\textsuperscript{104} Kalidas Nag, \textit{Tolstoy and Gandhi}, p. 107, citing Gandhi’s writing on Tolstoy Farm.
It was primarily the need to make contemporary Jewish concerns better known that finally brought Kallenbach to India to meet Gandhi.\footnote{Simone Panter-Brick, *Gandhi and the Middle East: Jews, Arabs and Imperial Interests*, pp 30–7 and Shimon Lev, *Soulmates*, pp. 122–135. For reasons of space we have not explored this theme further in this article.} Kallenbach landed at Bombay port on the afternoon of 20 May 1937; the hot season found Gandhi at Tithal, near the seaside.\footnote{C. B. Dalal, *Gandhi: 1915–1948: A Detailed Chronology*, p. 120; Ramdas Gandhi, *Sansmaran*, pp. 48–9.} The guest was received in Bombay by a group of persons including Gandhi’s nephew Mathuradas Trikumji and Gandhi’s third son Ramdas; later that night Kallenbach and Ramdas took the train to Valsad, reaching there at 3 am on the next day; waiting for Kallenbach at the Valsad railway station at that early hour were Gandhi’s wife, Kasturba, accompanied by Gandhi’s secretary, Mahadev Desai.\footnote{Ramdas Gandhi, *Sansmaran*, pp. 48–9.} From there they went on to Tithal where Gandhi was sitting up awaiting Kallenbach’s arrival; Ramdas writes of the joyful tears to which the two friends gave vent after their long separation of more than two decades.\footnote{Idem.} A few days later the two went to Segaon near Wardha where Gandhi had settled from the mid-1930s.

During Kallenbach’s visit in 1937, one Captain Strunk, a representative of an official German daily newspaper and a member of Hitler’s staff, was in India to “investigate conditions in India”. The Captain called on Gandhi for a conversation. There were ambiguities in Kallenbach’s national identity as, although his origins were in the East Prussia – Lithuania border areas, he had been detained during the First World War as a German; these fluidities Gandhi utilized to great effect on this occasion in 1937. According to the account in Gandhi’s journal, *Harijan*:

“As Capt. Strunk prepared to leave, Gandhiji introduced him to Mr. Kallenbach.

G. [Gandhi:] Here is a live Jew and a German Jew, if you please. He was a hot pro-German during the War.

Capt. Strunk was surprised to see a German Jew sitting there bare-bodied and in a khadi dhoti.

G. Then I should like to understand from you why the Jews are being persecuted in Germany.

Capt. Strunk tried to explain....

S. [Strunk:] I personally think we have just overdone it...”\footnote{*Harijan*, 3 July 1937, CWMG, Vol 65, p. 362; see also Simone Panter-Brick, *Gandhi and the Middle East: Jews, Arabs and Imperial Interests*, p. 33.}
Kallenbach returned to South Africa soon after in the same year. Gandhi’s son Ramdas decided to go to South Africa as well and Gandhi gave instructions for Ramdas’s passage to be booked along with Kallenbach’s. The latter would visit India and Gandhi again in 1939. Meanwhile, about his own South African commitments, such as the Phoenix settlement near Durban, of which Kallenbach had remained a trustee, Gandhi continued to consult with Kallenbach. On 21 May 1938, 24 years after he had left South Africa, Gandhi wrote to Kallenbach, “the only active trustee,” thinking aloud about the sale of the printing press at Phoenix and still nursing one wish: “I hope we can hold on to the land, turn it into a model agricultural farm, and settle on it Indians or even Zulus – provided of course that is made self-supporting.”

In the following month, in what is usually the hottest time of the year in India, Hanna Lazar arrived to stay for sometime in Gandhi’s settlement at Sevagram, near Wardha in Central India. Gandhi wrote to Amrit Kaur, his close associate and follower: “We have a newcomer in Kallenbach’s niece. She is an extraordinarily good woman. But our climate may floor her. She came in only yesterday.” A fortnight later, Gandhi wrote again to Amrit Kaur: “Hanna has been sent by Kallenbach to gain experience and to know me personally as she has known me through him for years. She is most lovable but I fear she is too delicate to be able to stay here long.” For this and similar reasons, Gandhi arranged for Hanna to return early to South Africa.

Gandhi’s British friend Muriel Lester recalled that in the winter of 1938–9 she found Gandhi himself “renewed in strength” and “rejuvenated” on account of two events. The first was “his time with Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan on the North-West Frontier”; and the second was “the arrival of his old friend, Herman(n) Kallenbach, from South Africa”. Of Gandhi and Kallenbach, Lester wrote: “The two of them did everything together. They reminded me of a couple of school boys”. During his visit to India in 1939, Kallenbach too fell ill though he soon recovered. The illness, however, had been serious enough for Gandhi to decide to send for specialist doctors. “Kallenbach is on death-bed,” Gandhi had written to his secretary, Mahadev; but Dr. Chesterman, “an efficient doctor” who happened to be visiting India to attend a missionary conference, was

115Idem.
at hand and was consulted.\textsuperscript{116} On this visit, Kallenbach had been pre-occupied with serious worries over the fate of Jews in Germany and the gathering clouds of war. Leaving New Delhi at the end of March 1939, Kallenbach would return to South Africa.\textsuperscript{117} It was a time of crisis for the Congress which was in the throes of a divisive presidential election, and for India which in the next few years would witness the last Gandhi-led struggles against colonial rule and the incarceration of thousands, including Gandhi himself.

Events moved fast after 1939 and soon Gandhi was again in the midst of a satyagraha campaign, a precursor to the Quit India movement of 1942. Writing in the first week of January 1941 to Manilal and Sushila Gandhi in South Africa, Gandhi concluded by noting: “There was a letter from Schlesin. There has been none from Kallenbach for some time.”\textsuperscript{118}

Gandhi would emerge from prison in 1944 and a year later his old friend Kallenbach would be dead. Soon after his release from prison in 1944, Gandhi had resumed correspondence with Kallenbach. As often before, Gandhi would write to Kallenbach at a time of crisis. In the midst of crucial talks that Gandhi was conducting in Bombay (now Mumbai) with M. A. Jinnah, in an attempt to avert the partition of India being sought by the Muslim League leader spearheading the Pakistan movement, he wrote: “You will see I am in Bombay almost daily meeting M. A. Jinnah. God only knows what the result will be.”\textsuperscript{119} Eleven weeks later Gandhi wrote again with suggestions on the restructuring of the Phoenix Trust and offered his comments on a proposal that had been made for a memorial at Phoenix for Gandhi’s devoted wife Kasturba who had passed away in prison in India during the Second World War.\textsuperscript{120} The question of a memorial to her at Phoenix in Natal drew also from the fact that decades earlier, in the struggle in South Africa in 1913, Kasturba had been incarcerated in Pietermaritzburg prison.

The news of Kallenbach’s death in Johannesburg on 25 March 1945 was immediately communicated to Gandhi and evoked a warm tribute:

“South Africa has lost a most generous-minded citizen and the Indians of that subcontinent a very warm friend... In Hermann Kallenbach’s death I have lost a very dear and near friend. He used to say to me often that when I was deserted by the whole world, I would find him to be a true friend going with me, if need be, to the ends of the earth in search of...”

\textsuperscript{117} Gandhi to Amrit Kaur, 31 March 1939, CWMG, Vol 69, p. 94.
\textsuperscript{118} Gandhi to Manilal and Sushila Gandhi, 2 January 1941, CWMG, Vol 73, pp. 270–1.
\textsuperscript{119} Gandhi to Kallenbach, 18 September 1944, CWMG, Vol 96 (Suppl. Vol 6), p. 302.
\textsuperscript{120} Gandhi to Kallenbach, 3 December 1944, CWMG, Vol 96 (Suppl. Vol 6), pp. 302–3.
Truth. He used to spend at one time £75 per month on his person alone. But he so revolutionized his life that his monthly personal expenses amounted to under £8. This lasted while we lived together in a cottage seven miles from Johannesburg. When I left South Africa, he reverted in large part to his original life though mostly eschewing the things of life he had deliberately left... He came in close touch with the late patriot Mr. G. K. Gokhale, who held him in high esteem. It may be noted that together with Henry Polak, Mr. Kallenbach was arrested for marching with me from Natal to Transvaal.”

An association of more than four decades, stretching across three continents, had come to a close. To Kallenbach’s niece, Hanna, Gandhi wired exhorting her to continue Kallenbach’s public service. In a personal letter a few weeks later to Sonja Schlesin, Gandhi’s secretary and associate in South Africa, Gandhi wrote: “A truly good man has left us.” He recalled Kallenbach again with much warmth in a letter at the end of the following year to Kallenbach’s niece, Hanna, who had written with news about herself and her family; Gandhi, who at this time was seeking to calm troubled waters in the inter-communal strife in East Bengal, “the most difficult piece of work in my life”, wrote:

“Do not hesitate to write to me... I feel like writing in order to encourage you to write to me regularly and also to tell you that you have in me your best friend who will try somewhat to do what Hermann used to do so fully. You are bound to miss him as we all do. He certainly expected to come back to me had he lived.”

In 1946, Sonja Schlesin lost her mother, Helena, who had entrusted her to Kallenbach and who in turn had brought her to Gandhi. Her correspondance with Gandhi continued till the end of his days. In answer to her query about any possibility of Gandhi visiting South Africa again, Gandhi wrote saying he doubted whether there was any such chance; he said he still expected Sonja “to drop in here and pass the rest of your days in India,” while conceding that the climate in India might not suit her as it had not suited either Kallenbach or Hanna, during their respective visits. They corresponded freely as she was not over-awed by him and nor was he wary of chiding her for fear of giving her offence.

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125 George Paxton, Sonja Schlesin, p. 47.
Sonja’s great empathy with the Indian struggle and devotion to Gandhi is reflected in a letter she wrote to Gandhi probably in mid-1945, referring to reports about his illness and alluding to his desire to live 125 years, an ancient Indian measure of the proper human lifespan: “I was not greatly perturbed when you were ill (I regret your suffering of course) because I felt confident that you would not depart hence until India was free... I have not the slightest doubt that you will live until you are 125, if only you desire it.” Sonja’s great empathy with the Indian struggle and devotion to Gandhi is reflected in a letter she wrote to Gandhi probably in mid-1945, referring to reports about his illness and alluding to his desire to live 125 years, an ancient Indian measure of the proper human lifespan: “I was not greatly perturbed when you were ill (I regret your suffering of course) because I felt confident that you would not depart hence until India was free... I have not the slightest doubt that you will live until you are 125, if only you desire it.”

The remarks obviously moved Gandhi who began his reply with two sentences: “Your letter. I value it for its contents.” She appears also to have suggested that Thambi Naidoo, Gandhi’s eminent associate in South Africa, be appropriately commemorated; to this Gandhi responded:

“I agree about Thambi Naidoo. Anything can be named after him here. It will mean nothing. Something worthy should be done there. You must shape things there. Thambi must have many admirers besides you and me... Could you send me a photo of the family with Thambi in it?”

Sonja had several other, somewhat lighter references, including to the San Francisco Peace Conference where she said she expected to meet Gandhi and return from there with him to India: “If you are short of secretaries to accompany you to the Peace Conference, call here on the way and I shall come along.” In response, Gandhi renewed the invitation to Sonja to visit India: “So you see, San Francisco was managed without you and me. But you are dropping in here one of these days.”

In answer to one of Sonja Schlesin’s letters, Gandhi wrote suggesting that, uncharacteristically of her, she had written the letter “for the sake of writing”; presumably Sonja had twitted him about his skepticism over unrestrained industrialism and he used the opportunity to make a point about economic systems:

"A highly industrial system under capitalism and full employment are incompatible,” concluding his telegraphic reply with the comment that an opinion she held about

127 CWMG, Vol 80, p. 125n3.
129 Idem.
130 CWMG, Vol 80, p. 125n1.
Manilal needed revision, and the suggestion that issues raised by her be discussed “when we meet, if we do.”

Somewhere at the back of his mind, Gandhi nursed the idea that his loyal secretary might one day visit him in India. That was never to be. He had expressed a desire to live for a 125 years, a classic ancient Indian aspiration. He had briefly lost that desire in the face of inter-religious violence in India from 1946 onwards and especially in 1947. However, the notion had caught Sonja’s fancy and at this time, within weeks of Indian independence, Sonja wrote to him in continuation of a theme she had touched upon two years earlier: “Far from losing your desire to live until you are 125, increasing knowledge of the world’s lovelessness and consequent misery should cause you rather to determine to live longer still... You said in a letter to me some time ago that everyone ought to wish to attain the age of 125, you can’t go back on that.”

In reply, Gandhi mocked her affectionately:

“Usually your letters are models of accurate thinking. This one before me is not. You talk of ‘my decision to live 125 years.’ I never could make any such foolish and impossible decision. It is beyond the capacity of a human being. He can only wish. Again I never expressed an unconditional wish, nor did I, so far as I remember, advise you to entertain any such unconditional wish. I think if you re-read my letter you will find that my wish was conditional upon a continuous act of service of mankind. If that act fails me, as it seems to be failing in India, I must not only cease to wish to attain that age but should wish the contrary, as I am doing now... More when you come to India and if I am alive when you do...”

Yet, Sonja’s reasoning must also have had some impact in reviving his spirits, as shortly before his death, seeing an improvement in the inter-communal situation on the basis of pledges given to him by representatives of the various communities, Gandhi remarked: “If the solemn pledge made today is fulfilled, I assure you

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132 Gandhi to Sonja Schlesin, 11 March 1946, CWMG, Vol 83, p. 239.
133 CWMG, Vol 89, p. 449n.
134 Gandhi to Sonja Schlesin, 1 November 1947, CWMG, Vol 95 (Suppl. Vol 5), pp. 165–6. There seem also to have been some other suggestions in Sonja Schlesin’s letter, such as the adoption of the Roman script for Indian languages. In his reply, Gandhi said he was clear that “for generations to come the Roman script has no chance of having a foothold in India on a national scale.” She seems also in her wide-ranging letter to have made some inquiries related to Darjeeling, the Indian hill station in Bengal, to which Gandhi responded: “There is no position analogous to the Town Clerk in South Africa, but I need not worry you about the intricacies of the Indian system. If you will tell me what you wish to know about Darjeeling, I might be able to help you more quickly than anyone else.”
that it will revive with redoubled force my intense wish and prayer before God
that I should be enabled to live the full span of life doing service of humanity till
the last moment. That span according to learned opinion is at least one hundred
and twenty five years, some say one hundred thirty-three.” He would be assas-
sinated 12 days later.

Sonja Schlesin would live on in South Africa and teach at a High School in
Krugersdorp. Sonja passed away in the Johannesburg General Hospital on 6 Jan-
uary 1956; she was cremated and her ashes placed on the Wall of Remembrance
in the Braamfontein cemetery in Johannesburg.136

26 September 2015

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136 George Paxton, Sonja Schlesin, p. 48.
Gideon Shimoni, *Gandhi, Satyagraha and the Jews: A Formative Factor in India’s Policy Towards Israel*, Jerusalem, The Hebrew University, 1977
Some years back, I wrote a series of articles for a popular geographical magazine about the “Israeli Trail” – a hiking track across Israel. During that hike which I personally undertook, in a cemetery near the Sea of Galilee, I came across the neglected grave of Hermann Kallenbach, where his ashes are buried.

So I published a few lines about Kallenbach. Surprisingly, this resulted in an invitation by Mrs. Isa Sarid – Kallenbach’s niece – to “have a look” at the family archive. The archive was located in a tiny room in a small apartment up on the Carmel Mountain in Haifa. On the shelves there were numerous files carrying the name of Gandhi. One of the less known and missing chapters of Gandhi’s early biography was still waiting for a researcher to pick up the challenge.

Finding an archive like this might be the fantasy of any historian, but at that time I did not consider myself a historian. It was over a year later that I was trusted enough to be given the permission to copy the documents from the archive. It took five years more to complete my research. Still, even at that very first visit, I knew that the result should and would be a book. In 2012, it was published in India as *Soulmates: The Story of Mahatma Gandhi and Hermann Kallenbach*.

The story of Gandhi and Kallenbach, in my opinion, is a deeply intimate and personal story. But it also has historical and academic importance. This story is fascinating for yet another reason, as it proves and emphasizes the possibility of cross-cultural influences which can cause much greater outcomes, as was manifested in Gandhi’s impact on the world’s history.

The cross culture aspects of this story involve Lithuania, South Africa, India and Israel. It involves a young and successful architect named Hermann Kallenbach, as well as an ambitious young Indian lawyer named Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who at that time was perhaps unaware he was to become the fu-

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*This article is based on the public lecture delivered by Dr. Shimon Lev in Vilnius, Lithuania, on 1 October 2015, on the occasion of unveiling the monument to Gandhi and Kallenbach. All quotations provided in the article are authentic; their full references, which have originally been skipped owing to the genre of a public speech and hence not reproduced in this article, can be found in the author’s other works listed on the bibliography list of the article.*
ture Mahatma. Both Gandhi and Kallenbach were searching for their identities while living as unwelcome immigrants in South Africa.

But this story also involves Leo Tolstoy, the prophet of non-violence, who was among the main critics of Western civilization. It involves Hindus, Christians, Jews, Muslims, alongside with staunch Tolstoians and Theosophists as well as white racism. It also involves two ancient Asian nations on the process of a national revival, struggling for freedom in the age of the collapse of imperialism. But it also contains the most catastrophic event of the 20th century – World War II and the Holocaust. Gandhi on one hand, Hitler on the other – probably the two most famous figures of their time, but what a difference! And in-between there was Kallenbach, who was on the one hand a believer in non-violence, as a disciple of Gandhi, but on the other hand, shared the fears of the fate of his Jewish brothers in Europe, and particularly tried at the very last moment in 1939 to rescue his brother Simon Kallenbach’s family, as well as his other relatives, from the Nazi-occupied Klaipėda (Memel) in Western Lithuania.

Rarely can a historian come across such a story. But even if he does, he faces the risk of “destroying” it with the instrumentation of dry, boring academic facts and references. It is a true challenge to manage this risk, while at the same time giving due credit to the importance of this relationship in a broader historical perspective.

His relationship with Kallenbach played an important part during Gandhi’s most critical and formative years in South Africa. Gandhi’s twenty-one years in South Africa was the period in which he fully matured as the future Mahatma. All the components of his social-religious doctrine were developed there before he returned to India. Thus, the roots of every activity that he did as a key leader in the Indian struggle for independence was rooted in his South African experience. This fact by itself can give us more than a hint about how important his relationship with Kallenbach was. I claim that one cannot understand Gandhi’s process of development without studying his surroundings and encounters with his Indian and European supporters in South Africa. And of all the European supporters, Kallenbach was Gandhi’s most intimate friend, his “soulmate.” Kallenbach was the one who shared Gandhi’s most inner feelings, fears, hopes, ambitions, sorrows, joys and spiritual seeking. He is the one who also took a very active part in Gandhi’s various religious and lifestyle experiments. But in addition, he also played a key role in helping the Indian Struggle with his many practical abilities. Kallenbach was the one whom Gandhi could most trust, and to whom he could reflect his spiritual and political advances. When Kallenbach traveled in 1911 from Tolstoy Farm to visit his family in Lithuania, Gandhi defined them as “Spiritual Rope-Walkers.”
The Gandhi-Kallenbach relationship also contained a “second round,” which took place during Kallenbach’s Zionist mission to India in 1937. Kallenbach was asked by the Zionist leader and future Prime Minster of Israel Moshe Sharet to brief Gandhi on Zionism, and to try to get his support for a Jewish homeland aspiration in Palestine. Thus, the Gandhi-Kallenbach relationship not only traverses the dramatic events of the first half of the 20th century, but also connects the two great national movements: the Indian and the Zionist.

During the 1931 Round Table conference in London, Gandhi told a Jewish Chronicle reporter: “I have a world of friends among the Jews. In South Africa, I was surrounded by Jews.” And indeed this was a unique phenomenon, as among Gandhi’s closest circle Jews were many. One of them was Mr. Louise Rich, founder of the Johannesburg Lodge of the Theosophical Society; another was Gabriel Issac, a jewelry merchant; others were the Fogels, one of whom invited Gandhi to the Seder (Pesach dinner) and took him to the synagogue. Gandhi actually liked the “crispy Matzah,” but found the prayers to be long and uninspiring. There was of course Sonia Schlesin, his devoted Jewish secretary, whom Kallenbach had brought to work with Gandhi, as he knew her family from his Lithuanian time, and who was very highly praised by Gandhi in his autobiography.

But the two men who constituted Gandhi’s “whole world” were the English Jew Henry Pollak and the Lithuanian Jew Herman Kallenbach. They were called “Gandhi’s loyal prime ministers.” One can define Polak as Gandhi’s political man, but Kallenbach was undoubtedly his intimate one.

The Theosophical Connection
The encounter Gandhi had with the influential group of the Theosophical Society in London is well known. In South Africa, even though he distanced himself and refused to become a formal member of the Society, the Theosophists were Gandhi’s best recruiting ground for his European followers. Strangely enough, most of his Jewish supporters came from the Theosophical circle as well. As Jews, they were attracted to the Theosophical Society, which offered a universal approach, “inward” soul-searching, self-divinizing perfectionism, and non-orthodox opportunity to explore spiritual ideas. These Jews sought the universal dimension, first in the occult and the doctrine of Madam Blavetzky and Annie Besant, but later shifted their interest to the Indian lawyer. In order to understand the implications of the involvement of these Jews, one must also recognize their importance in the wider historical context of the later Jewish opposition to the Apartheid. As the late Nelson Mandela wrote: “In my experience, I have found Jews to be more broad-minded than most whites on issues of race and
politics, perhaps because they themselves have historically been victims of prejudice.” The root for that support was laid by Kallenbach and Polak. However, one should also remember that these individuals were actually going against the mainstream opinion of the South African Jewish community, and sometimes even against their own families. Thus, Kallenbach’s family regarded him as one who was trapped by “Gandhi’s Spell.”

Indians and Jews in South Africa

One can only speak about the predominately “textual encounter” between Jewish culture and Indian culture during the age of Orientalism. Reymond Scwab has called it the “Orientalist Reminiscence.” It was manifested mainly through the passion for translating ancient Vedic texts, just like the rest of Europe was going crazy about studying Sanskrit at that time. This interesting subject is not in the scope of this article, but it is important to emphasize that Jews in Europe had hardly met any Indian ever, just like the majority of the Indians of the vastly populated Indian subcontinent had never met a single Jew. Although there were ancient Jewish communities in India, their microscopic size made them insignificant. Actually, as it seems to me, the first real encounter between Jews and Indians happened when the Lithuanian-origin Jews (so-called “Litvak Jews”) who had emigrated to South Africa met the Indians who also emigrated from India to South Africa. So a few words about South Africa, Indians, Jews, and racism.

South African society at the end of the 19th century comprised a minority of whites and a vast majority of black people. There were also other minor communities of “colored” peoples, like Indian, Malay and a small Chinese minority. Racial classification was the single most defining factor in one’s social life. The social structure was divided into racial “castes,” with the privileged white group at the top of the pyramid. Politically, from the end of the 19th century until the end of apartheid, South Africa was a parliamentary democracy for its white residents and a white oligarchy for all the others.

The majority of Asians in South Africa were Indians. A small number were relatively well-to-do Muslim and Hindu merchants, but the rest were indentured workers working under conditions of quasi-slavery. Theoretically, the workers could choose either to return to India after five years of indenture or stay on in South Africa as “free Indians.” However, in order to prevent the laborers becoming free Indians, the South African government put special restricting laws in place.

After a few decades of such policies, the Indians in South Africa outnumbered the whites. In an effort to limit the so-called “Asian invasion,” the government proceeded to pass a series of decrees. For example, Asians were forbidden to purchase
land and to be in certain areas at night. They were further compelled to reside in designated areas which were called “locations.” Gandhi compared them to the Jewish ghetto. When Gandhi arrived in South Africa, he became the chief spokesman and leader of the Indian population in their struggle for a better attitude.

Meanwhile, Jewish immigration to South Africa was a by-product of massive Jewish migration from Lithuania to America via England. As a result of tempting descriptions in the Jewish press, where South Africa was called the “Promised Land”, many Litvak Jews decided to try their luck in South Africa. Ironically, those Jews, who sought refuge from the anti-Semitic repression of the Russian Tsar, found themselves in a society based on racial discrimination. Luckily for them, this time their racial-ethnic characteristics identified them with the ruling white population.

In the South African society of the late 19th century, a Jewish immigrant entered a framework of a purely white social group, and within this group he remained until the end of his life. Apart from the economic realm, in which he had, like all the other whites, master-slave relations with the non-whites, he did not belong to any non-white social institutions and had no social relations with non-whites. Ultimately, the Lithuanian and English Jewish communities in South Africa merged so much that the newly born South African Jewish community was described as “pouring Lithuanian wine into Anglo-Jewish bottles.” Another thing to be emphasized is that once they landed on the shores of South Africa escaping racism at home, the majority of South African Jews became racist themselves. In this context, Kallenbach’s support of Gandhi and the Indian Struggle stands out as a truly unique phenomenon.

Kallenbach’s Lithuanian Roots
Kallenbach’s father, Kalman Leib Kalmanovich, was a teacher in a town in the province of Žemaitija in Western Lithuania, barely two kilometers from the East Prussian (German) border of that time. Kalman and his wife Rachel decided to cross the border with their three children: Janet, Samuel, and Hermann and settle in the village of Rusnė, then under the German rule, but now part of Lithuania. There he changed his name to Kallenbach and opened a successful saw mill on the riverbank of the Nemunas River, and four more children were born. Before World War I, Rusnė played an important role in exporting timber from Russia to Klaipėda (Memel, then under the German rule). In the rural atmosphere of Rusnė, nature played a significant role in defining the Kallenbach’s family life. Sports was a major pastime and Hermann excelled at it more than his brothers. He swam from a young age, ice-skated on the frozen river in winter, crossed the Alps on a bicycle with his school friends, fished, and played tennis.
Kalman’s timber business prospered, so the parents decided to send their children to school in Klaipėda and, later, Tilsit (modern day Sovetsk). In 1890, Herman began his studies of architecture in the Strelitz Technikum in Germany. He continued his studies in the Royal School of Architecture in Stuttgart. Upon completion of his studies, he was drafted to serve as an officer in the military. He was discharged in October 1895, and on May of the next year he passed the architecture certification exams cum laude. After that, Herman migrated to South Africa, where his two uncles already had a very successful business. He started to work as an architect within a few days of his immigration, and soon he became a successful architect too.

The Meeting between Gandhi and Kallenbach
Neither Gandhi’s nor Kallenbach’s correspondence provides much details about their first meeting. The two most probably met in late 1903, at a professional level. A fruitful encounter between two people from such different worlds even today seems implausible. True, they were of approximately the same age (Kallenbach was thirty-two and Gandhi was thirty-four), and both had arrived in South Africa as immigrants. But the differences between the two were much larger to surmount. Kallenbach was Jewish, tall, white, secular, bachelor, ostentatious, a highly capable and affluent architect, lover of a wide variety of sports, theatre, luxuries, and women, addicted to satisfying his personal passions; and obviously enjoying his status as a member of the white ruling society. Meanwhile, Gandhi was an Asian lawyer, ascetic, frugal, focused on religion, morality, and truth, a family man on the brink of starting a life of celibacy (Brahmacharya), and dedicated to a public mission of social-religious reform of his community. Indeed, it is perhaps precisely these differences that account for their mutual attraction and would form the basis for their unique relationship.

In his autobiography, Gandhi describes his astonishment at Kallenbach’s hedonistic lifestyle:

“We met quite by accident. He was a friend of Mr. Khan’s and, as the latter had discovered deep down in him a vein of other-worldliness, he introduced him to me. When I came to know him, I was startled at his love of luxury and extravagance. But at our very first meeting, he asked searching questions concerning matters of religion. Our acquaintance soon ripened into a very close friendship, so much so that we thought alike, and he was convinced that he must carry out in his life the changes I was making in mine.”
The Upper House and the Lower House

The relationship between Gandhi and Kallenbach, which began on these formal grounds, quickly developed into a personal friendship. Kallenbach began to participate in Indian protest meetings, to support Gandhi financially and to visit Indians who were imprisoned as a result of the non-violent struggle. In 1907 or 1908, Gandhi and Kallenbach began living together. The two lived nearly a year and a half in Kallenbach's home in Johannesburg, the Kraal on Pine Road (so called due to the traditional African elements integrated into the building). Later, they shared an isolated “tent” in Mountain View on Linksfield Ridge near Johannesburg for seven months. The time during which Gandhi and Kallenbach lived together in Johannesburg constitutes one of the less written about periods in Gandhi’s life, and there is a lack of information about it.

One of the interesting pieces of evidence for this mysterious period can be found in a letter sent by Kallenbach to his brother Simon to Klaipėda (Memel), attempting to explain the dramatic changes he was making in his life:

“Mr. Gandhi, a dear friend of mine to whom I am very much beholden, sits at the same table with me in the kitchen and writes. Mr. Gandhi lives with me for the last three months. For the last five weeks we have no native servant and therefore we are attending ourselves to all our work. We cook, bake, scrub and clean the house and the yard. We polish our own shoes and work in the flower and vegetable garden. We are leading a most unusual life which helps a person to devolve independently and the person to become better (…). For the last two years I have given up meat-eating (…), for the last 18 months I have given up my sex life. (…) I have changed my daily life in order to simplify it and I found out that in every direction, this change has helped me…”

One can only imagine the anxiety his family must have experienced. After all, Kallenbach’s new lifestyle in accordance with the social-moral principles of Tolstoy and Gandhi, as well as his decision to support the Indian struggle and to live together with an Indian in faraway South Africa, must have perplexed Kallenbach’s Jewish bourgeois family. They were sure that he had gone mad!

In his second autobiography, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, Gandhi describes that period with a sense of humor:

“He (Kallenbach) would be hurt if I offered to pay him my share of the household expenses, and he would plead that I was responsible for considerable savings in his domestic economy. This was indeed true.”
An exemplary episode, which can describe the atmosphere of their shared life, was the famous story, which developed later as one of the myths about Gandhi. When Gandhi was released from jail, Kallenbach went to pick him up in his new car which was as that time very unusual. Kallenbach recounted this event:

“He sat in it, but not without a torment that could be read on his face. For the moment he was quiet, but when we got back home he berated me severely for my folly. ‘Put a match to it at once,’ he said. Instead of destroying it, it remained in the garage for over a year and was disposed of. But for eleven years after that incident I did not have a motor car.”

Gandhi summarized his experience as a “two-men ashram”: “Both of us were living a sort of ashram life (...) We were trying to seek the root of every activity in religion.”

Around this time, the two began writing each other using the nicknames “The Upper House” (Gandhi) and “The Lower House” (Kallenbach) throughout their extensive correspondence, most probably referring to the British Parliament constituting of House of Commons and House of Lords. In the context of his new lifestyle, Kallenbach was obliged to save every penny and was allowed to spend money only after Gandhi, “The Upper House,” approved the expense.

**Tolstoy Farm**

The exciting part, which constitutes one of Kallenbach’s most significant contributions, was the purchase of Tolstoy Farm, as well as his deep involvement in developing and running it. Gandhi understood that he had to establish a place for the impoverished group of Indians who were still willing to fight. This was a time of crisis, since the Indian merchants had stopped their financial support of the struggle. Gandhi aspired to establish a communal place, which would enable simple life in the spirit of Tolstoy. Kallenbach rushed to his aid, and in 1910 purchased a large farm located south of Johannesburg, which he gifted to Gandhi. Kallenbach also wrote to Leo Tolstoy from the farm, explaining why he named it after him:

“I have read many of your works, and your teachings have impressed me deeply... Having made use of your name, I thought I owe you this explanation and may add as justification of having used this name that it will make me endeavor to live up the ideas which you have so fearlessly given to the world.”
Gandhi also wrote to Tolstoy and described Kallenbach as a similitude of Tolstoy himself:

"Mr. Kallenbach and I have been friends for many years. I may say that he has gone through most of the experiences that you have so graphically described in your work My Confessions. No writing has so deeply touched Mr. Kallenbach as yours...."

Tolstoy replied to Gandhi, in a prophetic manner, that the non-violence struggle in faraway South Africa was the most important one going on in the whole world... Indeed, it is impossible to ignore the parallels that Gandhi draws between the journey of Kallenbach – the successful, hedonistic architect under Gandhi's spiritual guidance – and the quest of Tolstoy which made him the great prophet of simple life and non-violence.

Gandhi and Kallenbach moved to Tolstoy Farm in July 1910. Homes, schools, a carpentry shop and workshops were planned by Kallenbach and built quickly. In the Farm, collective communal life materialized fully and constituted the prototype of the future Gandhian ashram in India. This period was characterized by bursts of energy and spiritual development, and Kallenbach was the ideal partner, one who tried to implement every idea immediately. For example, when Gandhi claimed that consuming milk products was not healthy, Kallenbach proposed stopping their consumption at that very moment, and so it was. Self-labor, according to Tolstoy's doctrine, was a substantial principle, and that is why Kallenbach learned how to make sandals in a monastery. He taught Gandhi the same, and after a short period the latter took pride in the fact that he made fifteen pairs of sandals. Before he left for India, Gandhi even sent one pair to his bitter rival, the South African leader Jan Smuts.

At the end of the day, both Gandhi and Kallenbach were exhausted from the day’s work, but they would still jump upon long conversations about religion, non-violence, love, food, health and... whether it is good to kill the poisonous snakes swarming in the Farm (obviously not!) Kallenbach joined Gandhi in teaching at the mixed Hindu-Muslim school, a unique educational enterprise Gandhi viewed as extremely important.

The issue of walking the 42 km by foot from the Farm to Johannesburg was important to Gandhi. The residents competed to see who would cover the distance the fastest. The record was held by Jamnadas Kaka, who walked the twenty-two miles in four hours and thirty-five minutes. Kallenbach tried to break this record. To save time, he would snatch food from a wayside stall and toss down payment without stopping to take his change; this was faster than stopping to
take food out of his backpack. Though he broke Kaka’s record by a few minutes, Gandhi did not mark him down as the winner, claiming that purchase of non-Farm foods was against the rules of the Farm.

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of the cooperative experiment called Tolstoy Farm and its influence on the formation of the social and spiritual ideologies of Gandhi. The Farm was a laboratory for testing Gandhi’s ideas; it enabled him to realize the applicability of his methodologies in daily life. Gandhi wrote:

“My faith and courage were at their highest in Tolstoy Farm. I have been praying to God to permit me to re-attain that height, but the prayer has not yet been heard.”

In Tolstoy Farm, Gandhi built his leadership facility, a capacity which was further developed during the final stage of the Indian Struggle in South Africa. These undertakings prepared him for his unique leadership in India.

Kallenbach’s Visit to Europe

Kallenbach missed his family in Germany and Lithuania, which he did not see for many years. In 1911, when the Indian Struggle was on hold, it was a suitable time to undertake this visit. But this was not supposed to be a “regular family visit;” Kallenbach and Gandhi regarded this trip as a “holy mission” and a “pilgrimage,” whose objective was to generate a change in Kallenbach’s family’s life. The two even signed a unique contract which lights the aims of this visit and their demanding way of life:

“Lower House is to proceed to Europe on a sacred pilgrimage to the members of his family (...) Lower House is not to spend any money beyond necessaries befitting the position of a simple living poor farmer. Lower House (...) shall not look lustfully upon any woman....”

From the very beginning of his visit, Kallenbach set about trying to convince his family to change their lifestyle according to the values dear to him. He constantly preached about living a healthier and more modest life. Gandhi wrote him: “You have made yourself an advertising agent for me. You compel people to like me where before they did not. I can only hope that I shall die as you think I am.”

The beginning was promising, but his relationship with his niece Judith was problematic and put Kallenbach on a difficult test. This strange story is explored
in greater detail in my book *Soulmates. The Story of Mahatma Gandhi and Hermann Kallenbach*, so I will not delve into it again. Suffice it to say that Kallenbach’s feelings towards Judith provoked Gandhi to remind him of the contract they had concluded before Kallenbach’s departure to Europe.

The Indian Struggle resumed at the end of 1913. Kallenbach had a crucial and key role in supporting the Great March. He was logistically responsible for the movement of thousands of Indians who crossed the border in order to get arrested. After Gandhi’s and Pollak’s arrest, Kallenbach remained the only leader of the thousands of marchers until he, too, was arrested. In prison, Kallenbach wrote a diary-letter which was sent to his family. Kallenbach describes his arrest in greatly romanticized detail:

“*The day of my arrest is to me ‘the day of the Lord.’* It was about 7 pm, a mild South African evening; the moon was just rising behind the historical Majuba Mountains, when an elderly police officer approached with a telegram in his hand. He saluted and asked me to step aside with him for a moment. He told me that he had just received this telegram with the command for my arrest, and he much regretted being the one to carry out this duty. I comforted him, thanked him for the message. I remained alone. The heavy prison door closed, the loud rattling of the keys and the sound of the departing steps of the warden were wonderful to my ear. There was now a strange silence. All the prisoners seemed to sleep soundly. In the meantime, also the soft light of the moon entered the courtyard. With all my heart I sent up my prayers to god, thanking him that he had deemed me worthy of this experience in my life. Thus began the first night in the prison which will not leave my memory ever.”

To his disappointment, Kallenbach was only sentenced to three months in jail, without hard labor.

**The Trip to England and the Detention Camp**

At the end of the struggle in 1914, Gandhi took Kallenbach to India with him as his right arm. During the farewell reception, Kallenbach was told: “In the history of the great Passive Resistance movement, your name will glitter in letters of gold.” Gandhi placed his hand over Kallenbach’s shoulder and said:

“I carry away with me not my blood brother, but my European brother. Is not that sufficient earnest of what South Africa has given to me and is it possible for me to forget South Africa for a single moment?”
The philosophical conversation about the fate of Kallenbach’s expensive binoculars, which the two had during their cruise on the way to London, laid the ground for another myth. Gandhi argued that these binoculars were a luxury and the “possession [of them] was not in line with the ideal of simplicity” professed by him; therefore, Kallenbach should get rid of them. Kallenbach said they were useful for the long journey on the sea. At the end of the argument, Gandhi tossed the expensive binoculars into the ocean. Kallenbach cried for the entire day.

Unfortunately, they arrived in England on the 6th of August, two days after World War I broke out. Gandhi’s efforts to obtain a travel permit to India for Kallenbach, who was a German citizen, failed, and Gandhi had to continue his journey to India with Kallenbach’s “books and boxes” only. In June 1915, when Kallenbach was imprisoned in a detention camp for alien citizens, Gandhi took care to write him once a week. But the correspondence stopped in 1917. Kallenbach was freed and sent to Berlin in a prisoner exchange. Strangely, Kallenbach did not inform Gandhi of his release. He certainly did not attempt to join Gandhi in India. It is difficult to explain this interruption. It is obvious that the cause wasn’t purely the technical communication difficulties in the aftermath of the war; rather, there must have been psychological reasons for that. While Gandhi was making a name for himself as the leader of a mass movement in India, Kallenbach was penniless, lonely, and wandering aimlessly in Berlin, which he described to his brother Simon as a “corrupt city with selfish residents.” The disillusioned Kallenbach must have felt deserted by Gandhi. Kallenbach decided to take some time away from his relationship with Gandhi in order to re-examine his life. In addition, his family had never understood his choice to live as an ascetic under Gandhi’s influence and pressured him to adopt a lifestyle more similar to their own. Kallenbach would have found it difficult to counter the argument his family must have made that the one most responsible for his tragic fate and the present chaos in his life was no other than Gandhi himself.

Reunion
Kallenbach returned to South Africa in 1920, and the excited Gandhi, who somehow discovered that Kallenbach was alive, wrote him:

“If I was free, I would have run down most decidedly to meet you, hug you and once more look you in the face. For me you have risen from the dead (…) I had decided that you had left this little globe of ours. You cannot imagine the joy
of the thought I may yet see you in the flesh and meanwhile begin to receive your love letters.”

In another letter he wrote: “As I write, the whole of the old life rises before me. But I must restrain myself.”

In 1936, Moshe Sharett, head of the political department of the Zionist Movement, learned that Gandhi had a very close Jewish friend. He wrote Kallenbach a passionate letter, asking him to go on “a Zionist mission” to India to try to change the Mahatma’s negative views on Zionism. He wrote: “You are in a unique position to help Zionism in a field where the resources of the Jewish people are so meagre as to be practically non-existent.”

Kallenbach responded positively and set off to Gandhi’s ashram in May 1937. It is hard to depict the emotional context of the meeting after 23 years of separation. Kallenbach arrived at four-thirty in the morning. He entered the big porch overlooking the ocean and sat on the floor silently. Gandhi and a small group of disciples were busy with the morning prayers. It was still dark outside. Kallenbach described the meeting to his brother Simon in Klaipėda:

“When the prayers were over, we all stood up, me too with little difficulty having lost the habit of sitting on the floor. Bapu approached me, embraced me and put the question after how many years? Come to the light that I have a good look at you. He drew me into a room, took a lantern and lit my face and head. Touching my head, he said: your hair has turned gray like mine (...) It is almost the old way of life that we have accepted, as if the 23 years and all the happenings which affected millions of people had not been in between.”

Kallenbach stayed in the ashram for about six weeks, ate and slept beside Gandhi and talked with him a lot about Zionism. A careful reading of Gandhi’s letters to Kallenbach from that time reveals a surprising, fascinating and perhaps unknown gap between Gandhi’s known public objection to Zionism and his support of Kallenbach’s “private Zionism.” Gandhi even wanted to mediate in the struggle between Arabs and Jews and designated Kallenbach and the priest Andrews for this purpose.

After Gandhi’s mediation attempt received no response from the Zionist Organization, Gandhi came out with his famous proclamation “The Jews” in 1938, in which he called the Jews to disobey Nazi laws, to begin civil resistance and to be ready to die as a result. Kallenbach came for another visit in 1939, on the eve of the war. Gandhi wrote about Kallenbach in this context, a fact which empha-
sizes the tension between his non-violence doctrine and what was going on in Europe. Kallenbach was used as an example:

“I happen to have a Jewish friend living with me. He has an intellectual belief in non-violence. But he says he cannot pray for Hitler... I do not quarrel with him over his anger. He wants to be non-violent, but the suffering of his fellow Jews is too much for him to bear. What is true of him is true of thousands of Jews who have no thought of even “loving the enemy.” With them, as with millions, “revenge is sweet, to forgive is divine.”

Kallenbach died in March 1945, and bequeathed his money to the Zionist Organization, an act which Gandhi persuaded him to take. His body was cremated in Johannesburg in a Reform ceremony that agitated the Jewish community. Ironically, the Indians who came to participate in the funeral were denied entrance and had to make do with standing by the door.

In 1952, Kallenbach’s ashes were brought to Israel and buried near A. D. Gordon’s grave in Degania, the Zionist pioneer ideologist who advocated the concept of “Religion of Labor,” or as Gandhi and Tolstoy termed it, “Bread Labor.” This concept was practiced devotedly by Kallenbach and Gandhi in Tolstoy Farm half a century ago.

Conclusion
As it was mentioned in the beginning, it is impossible to understand Gandhi without understanding his relationships with those close to him. Between 1906 and 1909, Gandhi underwent an extremely significant transformation, which solidified his doctrine and incorporated the most vital components into his political philosophy. His partner and most intimate friend during these crucial years was Herman Kallenbach.

Kallenbach was the practical man, an administrator with many talents and the one responsible for Gandhi’s contact with the South African Indian population. He was the person Gandhi trusted implicitly; he was an important financial supporter without whom Gandhi could not have managed his struggle. Kallenbach was an ideal partner for spiritual experiments and extreme diets. He also was Gandhi’s confidante: Gandhi complained to him about marital problems and sent his children to him in times of crisis. But above all, Gandhi and Kallenbach were intimate soulmates, who were busy with spiritual growth in the molding periods of their lives. Their friendship was characterized by mutual efforts towards personal moral-spiritual development
and a common deep commitment to the Indian Struggle. Their relationship began with an attempt to live Tolstoian lives, including the special characteristics Gandhi added to them in South Africa, and ended with a renewed and significant meeting, in which Gandhi’s doctrine of non-violence was tested to its utmost extremity by the unprecedented evil of Nazism. Gandhi stuck to his position that even Hitler’s heart would melt in a Satygraha struggle, but the Jewish and Zionist Kallenbach could no longer accept this and was in conflict on this issue.

Kallenbach and Gandhi both viewed their unique relationship as the most beautiful period of their lives, especially the Tolstoy Farm period. Their outstanding bonding can set an example for cross-cultural encounters, alongside with the openness for other people. It emphasized the role which individuals can play, willing to go against the prevalent political current, and doing so may have much greater outcomes than any one can imagine. Importantly, this amazing story started in Rusnė, Lithuania, which since recently is also a home to the unique Gandhi-Kallenbach sculpture – the only one in the world featuring the two soulmates together. The cross-cultural aspects of the Gandhi-Kallenbach relationship combine Lithuania, South Africa, India and Israel, and traverse the dramatic events of the first half of the 20th century. They also provide an immense capital to build on in the future.

Bibliography:


A Lithuanian Gandhi? Lithuanian Philosopher Wilhelm Storostas-Vydūnas and His Reception of Indian Philosophy

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Philosopher Vydūnas (1868–1953) stands out as a unique figure in Lithuanian intellectual and cultural landscape, and so does his personal and academic legacy which has left an indelible imprint on Lithuanian cultural identity. Despite his significant contribution to the development of our national culture, Vydūnas’s name had almost gone into oblivion in the 50 years of Soviet occupation. It was sustained, preserved and revived mainly by local enthusiasts who drew inspiration from his ideas and saw him as an organic link to Indian philosophy. The latter had started making inroads into Lithuanian culture already by early 20th century, as witnessed by the works of poets Maironis and Jurgis Baltrušaitis, painter and composer M. K. Čiurlionis, writer Vincas Krėvé, and philosopher Stasys Šalkauskis.

Vydūnas’s life path, albeit long, was rather simple.1 Born in Jonaičiai (Šilutė district)2 on 22 March 1868 into a local Lithuanian family,3 he got Vilhelmas (Wilhem) as his first name and Storostas as his family name. Vydūnas spent his childhood and early schooling years in Naujakiemis, near Pilkalnis (presently Dobrovolsk in the Kaliningrad district of Russia), and later joined a teacher training seminary in Ragaiņė. Later he worked as a schoolmaster in Kintai and after that in a secondary school for boys in Tīšė (Prussian Tilsit). Vydūnas was of delicate constitution (consumption was hereditary in the family); thus he became a vegetarian and retired quite early in life, at the age of 44 (in 1912).

1 Vydūnas’s life and intellectual legacy has been thoroughly studied by a contemporary Lithuanian scholar Vacys Bagdonavičius. Thereinafter I will provide a compendious overview of Vydūnas’s biography based on Bagdonavičius’s study. See: Vacys Bagdonavičius, Filosofiniai Vydūno humanizmo pagrindai.

2 Interestingly, Vydūnas’s birthplace is just 8 km away from the native town of Hermann Kallenbach, another prominent figure connecting India and Lithuania.

3 Šilutė and the neighboring areas, traditionally populated by ethnic Lithuanians, have for centuries been under the German (Prussian) administration. According to the official statistics, there were 1,46,000 Lithuanians residing in the Prussian Province of Germany in 1867 and 99,000 in 1910. In certain areas, Lithuanians constituted more than 20% of the total population. Hence its name as ‘Lithuania Minor’. Lithuania Minor played a crucial role in Lithuanian culture and history as it is home to the first Lithuanian-language printed book (1547), first Lithuanian grammar (1653), first Lithuanian poem (1765–1775), first Lithuanian-language newspaper (1823) and many other landmark achievements.
During the summers, while still a teacher, Vydūnas attended courses at Greifswald (1896–98), Halle (1899), Leipzig (1900–02), and Berlin (post 1912) universities, where, exposed to the ideas of famous German philosophers of the time, he would go deeper and deeper into the subjects of history of philosophy, literature and art, philosophy of culture, religion, history, art and law, and sociology. Here in the academic milieu, Vydūnas learned English, Sanskrit and French. However, as he did not take any examination, no university diploma was issued.

The main goal of Vydūnas’s cultural work was to foster the sense of national self-awareness and self-appreciation among the Prussian Lithuanians, first of all by stimulating their spiritual sagacity, promoting their aesthetic values, and helping them understand and unveil their “Lithuanian character,” i.e. to display to the others, particularly Germans, the creative potential of the Lithuanian nation, to reassert its cultural richness, uniqueness and attractiveness.4

The philosophical activity of Vydūnas, which started in the early 20th century as part of his cultural work, was following the same lines. During his studies in Leipzig, Vydūnas joined the German Theosophical Society, and in 1902 he founded a theosophical circle in Tilžė (Tilsit). Later, he would go to deliver public lectures in philosophy in Klaipėda, Šilutė, Tilsit and many other places of Lithuania Minor, and the abridged versions of these lectures would be reprinted in the local Lithuanian and German newspapers. In 1905, he started publishing a bi-monthly theosophical journal, Šaltinis (“Source”), and upon its termination in 1907 started publishing his philosophical treatises in separate volumes. At that time, he began using Vydūnas as his literary pseudonym, which became his penname. Etymologically, Vydūnas means “inward-looking” or “visionary,” but it also resembles the Sanskrit term Vidya – “knowledge” or “clarity of vision.”

Vydūnas had little interest in developing his own philosophical theories or provoking intellectual debate. Rather, he saw his mission in establishing clear ethical benchmarks which, if accepted and pursued by his fel-

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4 Bagdonavičius, Filosofiniai Vydūno..., pp. 53–8.
low countrymen, would “strengthen the foundations of the nation.” Thus, he readily borrowed the ideas from the wealth of universal philosophy and advocated them through his publications in the magazines of *Jaunimas* (“Youth”, 1911–14), *Naujovė* (“Novelty”, 1915), and *Darbymetis* (“Harvest”, 1921–25), which he co-authored.

With the ascent of Nazi dictatorship in Germany, Vydūnas became a target of public insults and even physical persecution. His historical study *Sieben Hundert Jahre Deutsch-Literarischen Beziehungen* (“Seven Hundreds Years of German-Lithuanian Relations”), published in 1932, served as a key reason, as it empirically corroborated the effects of forceful assimilation of Lithuanians in Lithuania Minor. The Nazis saw the book as “harmful to the Reich’s vital interests” and ordered its confiscation.

Fortunately, implementation of the order was delayed, allowing a small part of the first print run to be released and distributed.

The threat of persecution had little effect on Vydūnas. His undisturbed Gandhi-style attitude was driving the Nazi establishment nuts until it was decided to teach the liberal thinker a lesson. On 11 March 1938, he was arrested and incarcerated in Tilsit. But two months later, he was released from prison in response to the massive international outcry, started by the Lithuanian Writers’ Society which had sent petitions to the literary and philosophical circles, editorial houses and prominent figures of culture worldwide. There were even discussions and actual preparations to nominate Vydūnas for the Nobel Prize in 1938.

After his release from prison, the threats of prosecution stopped. However, the pain did not go away. Overwhelmed by the sufferings and atrocities of war, many of them unvoiced, Vydūnas dedicated himself to the philosophical contemplation of the doings of his time. This period saw the release of his major philosophical works: *The Life of the Nation*, *The Path of Mankind*, *Consciousness*, *The Origins of Destiny*, *The Structure of the Universe*, *Our Task*, *The Mysterious Glory of Man*, *Death: What’s Beyond?*, as well as a number of articles published in the periodicals of Lithuania and Lithuanian diaspora abroad. His prolific literary legacy comprises over 60 books in fiction, philosophy, historiography, and language studies; an autobiography; a few com-
plete sets of magazines written and published exclusively by himself; numerous articles in the periodicals of Lithuania Minor and Lithuania Proper; and over a dozen unpublished works. However, philosophy “as a way of life” lies at the heart of his study.

In October 1944, Vyduūnas fled from Tilsit, then under intensive shelling, deeper into inland Germany. Due to extremely harsh conditions at the IDP camp where he was attributed to, he soon left the camp and found himself in a hospital in Lübeck. Later he moved to the town of Detmold (Westfalen) in the British zone. There he spent the last seven years of his life. Having contracted pneumonia, Vyduūnas passed away on 20 February 1953, one month short of his 85th anniversary. He was buried in the old cemetery of Detmold, and in 1991 re-buried in the small cemetery of Bitėnai (Šilutė district, Lithuania).

Surprisingly, philosophy, which constitutes the bulk of Vyduūnas’s intellectual legacy, as well as the idealistic program which he tried to implement during his lifetime, were not his main objectives. Rather than delving into sheer theoretical considerations, Vyduūnas, first of all, focused on the possible solutions of real life’s problems. His intellectual pursuit started at the end of the 19th cen-

The main philosophical treatises of Vyduūnas
tury and lasted throughout the 1930s, i. e. covering the period when relentless Germanization in East Prussia had nearly attained its goal. The use of the Lithuanian language in public and private life had rapidly declined. Vydūnas had realized early that a radical struggle against the policy of Germanization would be futile, as it would only split the society and accelerate the assimilation of those Lithuanians who were keen to ride the wave of rapidly advancing German capitalism.

Vydūnas grew up in a religious milieu. His father, a local minister, had completed his missionary studies in Berlin but was forced to give up his dreams of overseas missionary activities due to poor health. Thus, he stayed and preached in Naujakiemis, Lithuania Minor, and subtly imbued his children with religious values, closely associating them with the moral essence of man. The firm moral principles which had formed in the child’s worldview often clashed with the episodes of the Scripture, particularly the Old Testament, where “owing to their brutality and heartlessness certain moments were inflicting pain.”

Vydūnas, Atsiminimai ir svarstymai tikybos atžvilgiu..., p. 144.
Personal soul-searching, along with his father’s guidance, allowed Vydūnas to conclude rather early that the Bible should not be taken to the letter. Rather, it needs to be apprehended symbolically, through the philosophical prism embedded in every depicted episode. Vydūnas got deeply absorbed in the theological works and studies of the history of Christianity, and took specific interest in the cosmogonic myths of pre-Christian people. He was particularly fascinated by the philosophical idea of immanent and transcendent God who persists in everything and above everything, as detailed in the work of a historian of Christianity, J. H. Kurtz.

Explorations of this kind encouraged Vydūnas to delve into philosophic studies. The ideas advocated by Wilhelm Schuppe, Professor from Greifswald University (1863–1913), particularly his concept of consciousness, according to which reality is but the content of consciousness, touched him deeply, as they matched the young thinker’s personal soul-searching attempts. The concept [of consciousness] not only served as the departure point in shaping Vydūnas’s own philosophical system, but also became one of its cornerstones, the substantiation of which he later found in Indian philosophy.

Vydūnas was strongly influenced and considerably benefited from the other German philosophers and scholars of the time whom he had met during his studies: E. Troeltsch, A. Rienl, J. Rehmke, K. Breysing, A. Hensler, K. Lamprecht, G. Folkelt, W. Wundt, U. von Willamowitz-Moellendorf, E. Lehmann, A. von Harnack. Thanks to them he could not only gather a broader picture of
the idealist German philosophy of the time, but also familiarize himself with the history of philosophy, particularly German classical philosophy.

His subsequent in-depth studies of the non-Christian religions (mostly Eastern – Egyptian, Parsee, Chinese, Indian, Arab), his scrutiny of holy writings, stories and interpretations, was in a way an extension of his childhood experiences. By no means was it an object of casual interest. Rather, it represented an ongoing pursuit of the answers to the same topical questions. Only this time these questions were carrying a deeper philosophical meaning: Vydūnas was increasingly concerned with humaneness as a philosophical concept, as a means to explain the cultural process and its essence. “All my studies and all my reflections were driving me deeper to the mystery of consciousness and, consequently, to what faith and culture actually stand for. I was constantly trying to judge from what different people in different countries thought and generated over millennia, about their spiritual level, including their culture,” said Vydūnas about his intellectual investigations of the time.6

The earlier interest in the nature of man, culture, religion and consciousness acquired a new impulse in Leipzig as well. This impulse was further triggered by the acquaintance with the local theosophists (at that time the German theosophical association was centered in Leipzig). Vydūnas was fascinated by their ideas and became an active member of the society.

In theosophy, Vydūnas was greatly impressed by the attempts to integrate philosophy, religion and science.7 The practical definition of purpose, offered by theosophists, looked highly appealing to him. This purpose manifested itself through the intentional move towards spiritual liberation of man and mankind. The theosophical movement was, in fact, one of the attempts to reform religion, particularly Christianity. As his biographer Bagdonavičius sums up, “Theosophy must have looked attractive for Vydūnas as a form of non-orthodox religious approach (…), as a doctrine which propagated no primacy of any religion, but at the same was asserting the same old esoteric truths in different languages.”8

Interest in theosophy was largely responsible for the philosopher’s growing focus on the old religion of Lithuanians, which came to hold a special place in both his historiosophic and philosophic works and his fiction (the trilogy *An Eternal Flame*, *The Shadows of Forebears*, and *The Blaze of the World* is a special case in

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6 Vydūnas, *Atsiminimai ir svarstymai tikybos atžvilgiu…*, p. 150.
8 Bagdonavičius, *Filosofiniai Vydūno…*, p. 78.
These neoromantic works underlined the idea that the old religion of Lithuanians was second to none in its individual way of appreciating the genesis of the world from the spiritual absolute. Its pantheistic nature, manifest through the animation of natural elements, showed not only its archaic character, but was also a sign of great maturity.

Theosophy was neither the last nor the main spring from which Vydunas drew while proceeding on his path as a thinker. However, it served as an important stepping stone towards another source which eventually gave his entire philosophical system its final touch – namely, the ancient Oriental, particularly Indian, school of thinking. Absorbed by the works of such theosophical authors as H. P. Blavatsky, A. Besant, E. Schiure, F. Hartmann, A. Sinett, B. Chatterji and others, Vydunas had an opportunity to peruse their ideas inspired by the Orient, which had already been integrated with the ancient philosophies (especially Pythagorism, Platonism, Neoplatonism), as well as Christian mysticism and European idealism of the modern age (notably, pantheism).

Thus, through theosophy Vydunas gained access to the essential postulates of Oriental, including Indian, philosophies. Under their effect he plunged himself into the studies of the ancient texts of India, the basic assertions of which later formed the nucleus of his own school of thinking.

In Indian philosophy, Vydunas seems to have found the answers which were particularly close to his own spiritual investigations and which, in his opinion, were best suited for his nation, desperately in need for rejuvenation and inner reconstruction at that time. Each school of Indian philosophy has a specific way of addressing the problems of ontology, epistemology, and spiritual liberation.
Also, nearly all of them are closely tied to or rooted in religion. This seamless interweave of the ethical and the religious was indeed very close to Vydūnas, a man of deeply religious upbringing. Under the influence of Indian philosophy, Vydūnas started the cultivation of the notion of a nation’s moral revival as the favored way to reestablish itself in the 20th century. Rather than advocating physical resistance, he urged his fellow countrymen to take up “cultural guns,” i.e. nurture and advance their national culture (a role in which he personally excelled), seek comfort and self-confidence in national values, seek human perfection and “growth from inside,” in order to morally surpass their oppressors. This concept closely reminds us of satyagraha, a notion coined and developed by Mahatma Gandhi.9

This culturally-grounded attitude, born out of daily affairs, conditioned the humanist approach of Vydūnas’s entire philosophy, which, in particular, stands for the need to reveal and substantiate the essence of humaneness, to show the ways leading to it, and to disclose the nation’s role in the advancement of it. In this context, Vydūnas attached a very important meaning to the close affinity between the Lithuanian language and Sanskrit. He wrote: “A higher consciousness of man is dawning. In India, this [higher consciousness] is locked in the ancient language [of Sanskrit.] And the Lithuanian language is a close surviving sister of Sanskrit. That’s why Lithuanians [have a duty] to apprehend and prominently manifest this new consciousness to others.”10

A holistic view of Vydūnas’ philosophical outlook reveals its unmistakable affinity to those of Indian socio-religious reformers, philosophers, spiritualists, and freedom fighters of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. They include R. R. Roy, Dayananda Saraswati, Sri Ramakrishna, B. G. Tilak, R. Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo and M. K. Gandhi. Their work helped the freedom struggle in India and laid the basis for a modern, tolerant and independent nation.11

There is no evidence that Vydūnas was familiar with their actual writings. He never mentioned them, save Gandhi’s concept of non-violent resistance, nor quoted them, bar a few Sri Ramakrishna’s quotations published in the magazine Naujovė (“Novelty”). Still, similarities between him and modern Indian reformers and activists are striking. As these analogies were not resulting from direct contacts or literary interaction, they can only be explained by the theory that both Vydūnas and Indian reformers of the late 19th–early 20th centuries

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9 Majmudar, Gandhi’s pilgrimage of faith..., p. 138.
10 Vydūnas, Mūsų uždavinys, p. 145.
11 King, Orientalism and Religion..., p. 135.
drew their inspiration from the same source – that of ancient Indian wisdom – and both were confronted with the analogous conditions of national oppression. Being driven by the same issues of social upliftment and national liberation, they naturally discovered similar answers in the pool of ages-old Indian knowledge.

The affinity of Vydūnas and modern Indian social reformers is best seen through their relation with their respective cultures and incorporating it as an instrument of national struggle against foreign oppression. What began as a socio-religious reform movement, transformed into a socio-political movement for independence. The efforts to revive, respect and reform ancient Indian tradition and culture awakened Indians, oppressed by colonial rule, to a new national self-awareness. The Indian reformers did not shy away from dropping old norms and advocating reforms to suit the times.

Developing independently, Vydūnas picked up the same principle. He promoted a universal worldview of humaneness, much like those in ancient Vedic philosophy. In his opinion, the new worldview would stimulate rather than subdue the national self-awareness of his compatriots. The reemerging nation should, in fact, re-collect the essence of its ancestral worldview. In this sense, Vydūnas stands out as a novel reformer offering a non-orthodox view to his predominately Christian countrymen, a view which would integrate their

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traditional Christian values with a larger universal God. Without urging Lithuanians to give up their Protestant or Catholic faith, Vydūnas sought to expand their awareness of other religions which, according to him, should be treated as alternative and equally justifiable ways of embodying the universal theist worldview shared by mankind. He argued that “Asian knowledge could be of great use for the West, as would be Western achievements for Asia.”

The parallels between Vydūnas and the modern Indian social reformers are both typological and genetic, as they emanate from the same philosophical source. These reformers (particularly Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, Rabindranath Tagore, Mohandas K. Gandhi) were followers of Vedanta, one of the six philosophical systems (darśanas), which constitute the philosophical basis of traditional Hinduism. In tackling the problems of the day, they sought out ideas in Vedanta and tried to adjust them accordingly. Basic among their sources were the Upanishads and Bhagavad Gīta, a fundamental part of the great epic, Mahābhārata. Each Hindu thinker of the late 19th–early 20th century was, in fact, interpreting the postulates of the Upanishads and Bhagavad Gīta, in order to provide a philosophical, and also ethical, explanation to the purpose and the tasks of the national movement.

The norms that these interpretations emphasized, such as Advaita Vedānta, are asserted as central, or fundamental, to Hindu culture. To that end the ideas of the Bhagavad Gīta were exploited most considerately.

The relationship of Vydūnas with Vedantic ideas is somewhat similar. He himself indicated on several occasions that the principles of classical Vedanta helped him “clarify” his own visions. He said, “I did follow the scholarly wisdom of the ancient Indian writings, called the Vedas,” and “the most glorious knowledge came to me from (…) the Upanishads.” In that sense, Vydūnas can truly be called the first Lithuanian neo-Vedantist.

The exceptional place of the Bhagavad Gīta in his philosophical teachings is reasserted by the fact that it was Vydūnas who translated it into Lithuanian in 1947, thus becoming the first Lithuanian translator of this sacred text. The depth of his commitment is illustrated by the scope of primary and second-

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13 Vydūnas, Šąmonė: Šąmoningumas ir nesąmoningumas..., p. 171.
ary sources used for this work. Vydūnas did start learning Sanskrit around 1910, but by the time he began the translation of the *Bhagavad Gīta*, he admits, he must have forgotten the language. Thus, he had to revert to other (mostly German and English) sources to continue with the direct translation from Sanskrit. The full list of these sources is provided below:

- Dr. Franz Hartmann, *Die Bhagavad Gīta, Das Lied der Gottheit*, Braun-schweig, 1897.

From the three schools of Vedanta – *Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, Dvaita* – the philosophy of Vydūnas stands closer to *Viśiṣṭādvaita* (limited monism) developed by Ramanuja (11th century AD). This school postulates the oneness of spiritual being and does not negate the reality of the world. On its basis, Vydūnas explains that the spirit and the material world constitute two opposite manifestations of the absolute. The absolute is not only eternal and unchangeable as in Śankara’s *Advaita Vedānta*, but is also capable of changing and manifests itself through involution of the objects in space and in time. After which evolution, which represents the opposite of involution, gradually brings the objects back to the absolute. Thus, involution and evolution constitute an eternally moving cycle of being, which contains not only the opposite extremes of the absolute, but also a multitude of other forms of reality characterized by different relations between being *sat* (consciousness) and non-being *asat* (unconsciousness). Human consciousness is not only individual but also universal. Vydūnas gives the following description of the meaning of involution and evolution: “Everything emerges from the unknown, passes through the dreamed plenitude and goes back to the known.” This “dreamed plenitude” is a kind of
play – līla, an illusion (māyā) of the Absolute, as defined by Vedanta. As a true advaitist, he says: “Everything vanishes and the whole world is only a mental image for the wise one.”

The stages of the absolute are just the phases of reality distinguished by its different relation to the consciousness: it starts with unconsciousness and then continues through the four spheres of the phenomenal world and three spiritual ones. Vydūnas most probably borrowed such interplay of Vedantic ideas with the concepts of evolution and involution from theosophical vocabulary.

Vydūnas lends an interesting interpretation of Indian philosophical ideas by suggesting that the spheres of inanimate nature (prakṛti), plant life (prāṇa), animal activity and desires (kāma), and human reason (kāma-manas) belong to the material world. To the spiritual one belong the spheres of omnipotence, wisdom, and love (Ātma-Budhi-Manas). The seven spheres which make the universe also have their expressions in man, which is treated by Vydūnas as a microcosm, a model of the universe. Man is also the highest phase in world evolution. The essence of humaneness (a variety of Ātma-Budhi-Manas similar to the Advaitic hypostasis of Brahmanic Sat-Cit-Ānanda) is already above all the material spheres and belongs to the sphere of pure spirit. It is also similar to the Christian concept of Trinity. What in man is associated with the material sphere – body (inanimate nature – prakṛti), life (prāṇa), instincts (kāma), reason (kāma-manas) – are the means of expression of the essence. Such structural analysis of the human nature resembles the ideas of the ancient Upanishads, as well as those of the orthodox Samkhya

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17 Vydūnas, Visumos sąranga, p. 9.
18 Vydūnas, Slaptinga ėmogaus didybė, p. 61.
school. The spiritual essence itself can be seen from the human self-consciousness (this self-consciousness is an expression of the spiritual absolute itself), wisdom, intuition, morality, consciousness, love, ability to overcome egoism, to feel and create goodness and beauty.

What makes up the social nature of man, the result of the millennia-long formation in Vedanta, is sought by Vydūnas in the metaphysically perceived absolute. The spiritual essence of man is a sparkle of the absolute, or divinity. Therefore, according to Vydūnas, as an adherent of the system of Indian philosophy, particularly of Vedanta, man belongs to both spiritual and material spheres of the absolute, and is a combining link of these two, an explicit evidence of substantial unity.

On the basis of the Vedantic concept of man and being, Vydūnas developed his concept of culture, which constitutes one of the most original and distinctive parts in the Lithuanian philosophy of culture. For a thinker who looks through the prism of Vedantic philosophy, culture is indispensable – i.e. ontologically conditioned – evolutionary part of the cosmic whole. Its origin is related by Vydūnas to the emergence of the humane sphere in that evolution. Through humaneness the evolution of the whole has already arrived at the level of pure spirit, where it wakens the self-consciousness of the absolute, finding its expression in the spirituality of man, his individual self-consciousness, which becomes one of the conscious factors in the world’s development. With the awakening of man as a spiritual being there begins an active, conscious overpowering of the “dreamed plentitude” and a purposeful return to the “reality perceived,” i.e. a process which could be compared to the synthesis phase of the Hegelian triad.

As Bagdonavičius puts it, Vydūnas defines culture as the relation of the spiritual essence of humaneness with the world, as the objective transfiguration of the former in the latter, as the process of spiritual enrichment of that world. The values born of this process are defined by him as cultural values. They are in fact the values of spiritual culture. Vydūnas does not deny the importance of material culture, i.e. civilization; however, he does not grant it the status of true culture. According to him, this is an auxiliary form of culture. If it is turned absolute, if its creation is overemphasized, it becomes a threat to genuine, i.e. spiritual, culture. The main goal of culture is to strengthen humaneness, i.e. the spiritual essence of man, to liberate him from his dependence on nature, and to achieve the maximum freedom of expression: “Indian
religious sciences are striving for the actual meaning of human life.”

In his opinion, this is the goal that an individual, a nation and mankind must pursue. In treating man as the principal subject of culture, Vydūnas attaches particular importance to man’s personal improvement. In his ethical model, which is part of the broader cultural concept, he outlines the main guidelines for man’s improvement, i.e. shows how one has to overpower the natural elements and make one’s own self, one’s spiritual beginning stronger and freer. The guidelines proposed by Vydūnas are closely related with the principles of Indian Yoga, particularly with the ways of perfection indicated in the Bhagavad Gītā — a selfless way of action (karma-yoga), devotion (bhakti-yoga), wisdom (jñāna-yoga), and strengthening of will (rāja-yoga). Almost all aspects of the Bhagavad Gītā’s ontology, ethics and psychology Vydūnas has separately discussed in his book Likimo kilmė (“Origins of Destiny”). Not neglecting the other, however, Vydūnas out these four emphasized karma and bhakti ways of perfection, as the most practical ones to contemporary needs.

Nation occupies a special place in Vydūnas’s concept of culture. According to him, the nation is given to man at the very beginning and is ingrained in him both naturally and spiritually. “Each nation, as well as each human being, has a particular mission and task.” They are both linked by body, blood and psychological, mental and spiritual relationships. On the basis of these relationships national culture is formed, and its specific and unique features are revealed, which accumulate and are particularly clearly expressed in the language, which is described as a “national banner,” or a specific, unique “song to humaneness.” For the language grows genetically together with the specific body, blood, as well as psychological, mental and spiritual qualities.

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20 Vydūnas, Sąmonė: Sąmoningumas ir nesąmoningumas..., p. 168.
22 Vydūnas, Tautos gyvena, p. 13.
which one receives from the nation. Broken bonds with the nation or loss of the mother tongue are a deviation from the natural course of one’s spiritual perfection.

To conclude, among the philosophers of the 20th century Vydūnas stands out as a highly unusual scholar: he neither graduated from a university nor completed any dissertation and earned a scholarly title. The complex philosophical system he has developed was hardly invented on purpose, as he never sought to, and never did, critically assess the systems or concepts of other thinkers. Vydūnas rather reminds one of an ancient sage (ṛṣi, kavi, muni) for whom philosophy was the mode and essence of life. He was not so much concerned with expounding wisdom, but more about embodying it in reality through his works and behavior. Vydūnas’s aim was to wake up the nation for the fulfillment of the sense of human and national being, i. e. to strive for “a more ideal humaneness.” In his landmark book Philosophy as a Way of Life (1995), the French scholar Pierre Hadot has unveiled to what extent philosophy has been,
and still remains, a way of seeing things and of existing in this world.\textsuperscript{23} That was exactly Vydūnas’s approach.

The basic assertions of Indian philosophy lie at the core of Vydūnas’s own philosophy. Indian philosophy attracted him by its deep sense of moral purpose and care for man, by its ability to provide a cosmological vision in its entirety and explain the roots of man’s suffering, at the same time unveiling the paths for overcoming this suffering. He himself noted on several occasions that the principals of classical Vedanta helped him “clarify” his own visions.

The pursuit of measures that would help his compatriots resist the national oppression constituted the bulk of Vydūnas’s philosophical endeavors. It guided him to the concept of spiritual perfection of man and nation, the practical application of which should, according to him, not only rescue the nation from extinction, but also give impulse to its intensive cultural revival. Namely, it is thanks to this pursuit that the unique intellectual character of Vydūnas, strikingly resembling that of Mahatma Gandhi, has emerged. The analogy to Gandhi is no accident here. Vydūnas (1868–1953) and Gandhi (1869–1948) were two contemporaries united by their struggle against foreign oppression, a struggle that evolved in analogous settings. But also they were two great thinkers tapping from the same intellectual source, the ancient Indian scriptures, which shaped their course of social action. That is why Vydūnas can rightly be called a “Lithuanian Gandhi.”

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Antanas Poška and Esperanto in India

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Readers familiar with Poška know what motorcycles are, but only a few of them have had access to information about the other vehicle that made his travels possible, Esperanto. A few remarks introducing this artificial language designed for international use – as a vehicle of peace and intercultural friendship – may not be inappropriate. Esperanto was launched in 1887 by Ludwik Lejzer Zamenhof, a Warsaw-based Lithuanian Jew. An oculist by profession, he was a visionary, focused on world peace. In addition to Esperanto, he also launched an interfaith cause, Homaranismo, in 1913. The name Homaranismo means “belief in (the principle of) membership of the human species.” Its basic principle is that as a human being one is obliged to take seriously the golden rule “treat others the way you want others to treat you,” and to regard all other religious values and practices as local cultural accretions. These accretion-laden faith-systems are obligatory only for those who voluntarily choose to adhere to them. While Homaranismo never took off as a movement with an independent following, many Esperantists regard it as the cultural core of what the language is about, but there is no rigid consensus about it in the Esperanto speech community. This lack of consensus has to do with the basic design feature of Esperanto: the fact that, like two-wheelers, Esperanto is a lightweight vehicle by design.

Esperanto is not just a language in which even an average person with limited language learning skills can acquire functional knowledge remarkably quickly. It is also the only language in which full proficiency can be attained through self-study. The widespread belief that Esperanto has very few takers – like the belief that bicycles and motorized two-wheelers are niche commodities incapable of making a real difference to transport – reflects systematic disinformation by pollution-prone competitors, not the empirical evidence. There are plenty of commercial products whose brand names have been taken from this language because it has no owners and erects no copyright barriers – watches and clocks called Movado, Rado, a soft drink called Mirinda, cars called Cielo, Baleno, buses called Volvo. From the abundance of these products, and the fact that names like Baleno and Cielo are reasonably recent, the global public should have been
able to draw the inference that Esperanto continues to serve some of our basic needs. But the managers of the publicity apparatus carefully conceal from public view the fact that these brand names are Esperanto words: *movado* (movement), *rado* (wheel), *mirinda* (wonderful) and so on.

For readers who take his ideas and practices at all seriously, the task of remembering Poška is bound to include an encounter with Esperanto. As it happens, that encounter brings us to India, the destination of his journey made possible by his two favorite vehicles – the motorcycle and this international auxiliary language.

Long before Poška made it to India, an active Esperantist in this country, the Parsi linguist Irach Jehangir Sorabji Taraporewala (1884–1956), was working for the cause. His positive approach to Esperanto was consistent with the overall take on language presented at some length in his linguistics textbook.¹ It is likely that fresh archival material will emerge some day showing that Taraporewala’s contribution was of greater significance than has been generally believed. In particular, since he was a Parsi rooted in Western India, he may have been in communication with the Maharaja of Kutch. This king, Khengarji III, was India’s representative at the League of Nations both in 1920, when India, China, Persia and eight other countries urged the League to take Esperanto seriously, and in 1921 – at that meeting India, China, Persia, Japan and nine other countries sponsored a resolution in favour of Esperanto, which France vetoed. Given the circumstances, the king of Kutch must have tried, either before or after such meetings, to find out what the best known linguist from his region of India had to say about Esperanto. But we have not found documents to prove this.

Let us return to documentable facts in general, and to Poška in particular. Bengal’s foremost Esperanto pioneer Lakshmiswar Sinha (1905–77), whom I met in 1968, put me in touch with Poška, with whom I corresponded very briefly around 1969–70. He mentioned having taught Esperanto, during his stay in Kolkata in the thirties, to a Bengali gentleman called Provat Ghose, and inquired if I could trace him; alas, this never did prove possible. Poška informed me that Ghose, under his mentoring, had translated Rabindranath Tagore’s play *Dakhghar* (“The Post Office”) into Esperanto. Poška was able to get it published in *Literatura Mondo*,² arguably the most important literary periodical ever to have appeared in the language – edited by the major Esperanto poet and translator Kálmán Kalocsay. Thus Poška continued the work initiated by Taraporewala, the

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¹ Taraporewala, *Elements of the Science of Language*....
first India-based Esperantist to have translated Tagore into Esperanto, and made available by Kalocsay to a wider audience. That the Parsi linguist and Esperantist Taraporewala was also among his circle of acquaintances is a conclusion I draw when I notice that after reaching India, Poška spent his first few years in western India with abundant logistic help from local Esperantists such as J. J. Modi; it is inconceivable that Modi was not in touch with Taraporewala, the doyen of Esperantists of western Indian origin.

Little did I know that several decades later I would, as co-editor of another literary periodical in Esperanto, Beletra Almanako, have an opportunity to arrange for the Poška–Ghose translation of Tagore’s play Dakghar to be republished, with some touching up and annotation;3 in my editorial comments, I highlighted Poška’s role as Ghose’s mentor. During the all too brief Dasgupta-Poška correspondence, I also had no idea that I would soon ask for Kálmán Kalocsay’s permission to revise his Esperanto translations of some of Tagore’s poems to be included in an anthology I had been asked to edit, and that this request would trigger a substantial correspondence with Kalocsay. Now that I have come to know, years after Poška’s passing, that he was in contact with the great Bengali linguist Suniti Kumar Chatterji, I realize that my own conversations with Chatterji, from 1971 to 1975, were yet another point of contact with the circle of major acquaintances who made Poška’s stay in India culturally worthwhile. The realization that I kept running into his circle of contacts throughout my formative years deepens when I recall the use of Taraporewala’s textbook at Sanskrit College, Kolkata, where I was an undergraduate student of linguistics; or when I remember my years as a postgraduate student (and later as a teacher) at Deccan College, Pune: Taraporewala was the first principal of that college when it was reconstituted in 1938 as a research institute, and he bequeathed his Esperanto collection to its library.

Suniti Kumar Chatterji loomed large on Poška’s map. That Chatterji took the Baltic connection seriously as well is a fact that I can vouch for, from my conversations with him. I vividly recall Chatterji showing me his copy of his Balts and Aryans. Chatterji spoke of his trip to the Baltic region with some warmth. He deeply appreciated the erudition and scholarly rigour of the academics he met there and recalled his long association with them, evidently bearing individuals such as Poška in mind.

While Chatterji was an important figure for Poška, it was Sinha, not Chatterji, who introduced me to Poška. This is no coincidence. Unlike Chatterji, Sinha was

a personal friend of his, and had a lot in common with his profile. Sinha’s lecture tour, which began in 1928 and included the Baltic region, may have been the starting point for this relationship. The dates available to us do suggest that Poška had left Lithuania by the time Sinha visited his region, but one may conjecture that Poška, who was on his way to India and was using the Esperanto community as a resource facilitating his journey, would have kept tabs on a prominent Indian Esperantist lecturing in the Baltic region. In any event, shortly after Poška moved to Calcutta in 1933 for higher studies, he visited Santiniketan, met Rabindranath Tagore, and worked on a high quality translation of *Gitanjali* into Lithuanian. In this phase of his Indian sojourn, Sinha, who was a Santiniketan-based teacher of woodcraft and shared Poška’s belief that self-reliant individuals would form the basis for the resurgence of nationalities that have been oppressed under the imperial yoke, became a close friend of his. Scholars interested in the details of Indo-Baltic relations in that period of our shared history will want to go back to the periodicals of the 1920s and 30s and assemble what can be ascertained about Sinha’s lectures in the Baltic States. Given the Sinha-Poška friendship, this is a matter of independent importance.

In order to show why, more needs to be said about Sinha’s own career. I am using his autobiography in Esperanto as a point of departure for my current, limited purposes. A fuller account will have to be based on parts of the archive that have not yet been explored by those competent to do so. Sinha’s impact on the community of Esperanto users not just in Estonia and Latvia but also in Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Switzerland, France, Britain – and this is not an exhaustive list – was so extensive that it will take scholars years to retrace his unusual journey and its reception.

What makes this use of the literary-comparative term “reception” particularly appropriate is the fact that readers of Esperanto literature encounter Sinha’s trajectory as a matter of course. As recent an autobiography as that of Urbanová devotes plenty of space to Eli Urbanová’s friend Lakshmiswar, whose name she domesticates: she calls him “Loki.” Classic works of fiction that appear on every reading list, such as Forge, register the ubiquitous Indian visitor Sinha as one of the constitutive images of the inter-war Esperanto landscape in Europe. When the Universal Esperanto Association – working in the context of a UNESCO initiative for cross-cultural dialogue – launched the book series *Orien-

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4 Sinha, *Jaroj sur tero*....
5 Urbanová, *Hetajro dancas*....
6 Forge, *La verda raketo*....
to-Okcidento, the very first publication chosen for inclusion in the series was a collection of short stories by Rabindranath Tagore in Sinha’s translation, Mal-sata štono. It is not the fact or extent of the impact that deserves commentary; Sinha’s is a widely known name in the Esperanto literary context. The point is to re-contextualize him.

To this end, one does need to rehearse the basic facts of his journey first – these facts are not on record in languages other than Esperanto. Born in 1905 to the landed gentry in the village of Rarhisal in British India, brought up in the context of the freedom struggle, Sinha visits Sriniketan in 1923. Sriniketan was a hamlet where Rabindranath Tagore, with the help of the agro-economist Leonard K. Elmhirst, had just established a rural development institution. Its goal was to help nurture a bridge community that would make Visvabharati – the international university he had established at Santiniketan to extend the already successful innovative schooling experiment – meaningful in its impoverished surroundings. Sinha studies at Sriniketan under Elmhirst’s supervision for three years.

In 1926, Sinha writes a monograph on woodcraft in education. Tagore recognizes the importance of his work. Visvabharati publishes the monograph, with a preface by Tagore himself, who appoints Sinha as a woodcraft teacher at the school in Santiniketan. Sinha’s account of his experiences as a teacher, in the form of a paper on the educational value of handicraft and human culture, is accepted at the conference of the Literary Academy of Bengal. An English version appears in Welfare, a monthly edited by A. Chatterji. Tagore advises Sinha to go to Sweden to get some training in the handicraft-based pedagogic system called slöjd. Sinha looks up all that he can find about Otto Salomon, writes to Nääs, is granted admission at the slöjd institute, obtains funding from his home district, and leaves for Sweden in March 1928.

As a slöjd student at Nääs, Sinha makes new friends, one of whom – Erik Thunqvist – takes him to Stockholm and puts him in touch with other foreigners; Sinha is of course learning Swedish, but progress has been slow. In winter 1928, he joins an Esperanto course run by André Cseh, an itinerant Hungarian Romanian teacher whose personalized variant of the direct method of language teaching intrigues him. Sinha goes beyond this crash course, spending time with Ernfrid Malmgren, Paul Nylén and other experienced Esperanto users. Within months, Sinha begins to publish in Esperanto. He begins with a one-act play, Ŝivaĝi, and a retelling of fairy tales, Bengalaj fabeloj.

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7 Tagore, Malsata štono....
This visibility gives him access to the local elite, which at that time includes vocal supporters of Esperanto: he meets Julin, a member of parliament, and Lindhagen, the mayor of Stockholm, who takes him home and shows him the sizable oriental section in his personal library. Sinha and his new acquaintances impress each other; Sinha publishes an Esperanto pamphlet *Kaj ĉio restas penso sed ne faro* (“And it all gets stuck in thoughts rather than actions”) where he ties Zamenhof’s thinking and that of Gandhi and Tagore into a seamless universalistic whole, which he argues cries out for immediate implementation. By summer 1929, Malmgren is planning an Esperanto lecture tour for him. From fall 1929 to spring 1930, he delivers two hundred lectures in Sweden – a high profile tour, including a visit to novelist Selma Lagerlöf. An Estonian lecture tour follows, later in 1930; this is followed by similar travels in Latvia and Poland, including a pilgrimage to Bialystok. He is invited by Cseh’s International Esperanto Institute (in The Hague) to attend a teacher training course and become an accredited Esperanto teacher; but before he is able to take them up on this offer, his brother Kshitiswar Sinha passes away, and he goes home instead.

Sinha takes up teaching in Santiniketan again. But a *slöjd*-based teaching venture cannot get off the ground without equipment, which cannot be funded from Indian sources in 1931–33, at the height of the global depression. Tagore sends him back to Sweden to arrange serious support for the pedagogic experiment: he would like to set up in Santiniketan a *slöjd* institute of pan-Indian scope and capabilities. Sinha goes back and strikes gold: a rich Swedish lady, Kerstin Hamilton, arranges to have well-trained *slöjd* teachers sent to Santiniketan at once. Ms. Jeanson spends a year there doing this work, and is followed by Ms. Cederblom; during this second year of the programme, Countess Hamilton and her artist son Herbert Hamilton visit Santiniketan; she spends some time with Kshitimohan Sen studying the mediaeval Hindu saints, while he learns some elements of Indian painting from Nandalal Bose.

While these enterprises are in progress in India, Sinha is deepening his mission as a sort of cultural ambassador not just to Sweden but to the Esperanto-speaking community. He takes part in the 1934 World Esperanto Congress in Stockholm. He lectures his way through Norway and Denmark. He visits Iceland. He undergoes pedagogic training at the Cseh institute in the Netherlands. He publishes a travelogue in Esperanto, *Hindo rigardas Svedlandon* (“Sweden through Indian Eyes”). Finally, on his way back to India in 1936, he meets such English Esperantists as Cecil Goldsmith and Harry Holmes. By this time, they are meeting on terms set by the Esperanto microcosm, modifying an encounter between the colonizer and the colonized that is already scheduled to end: in 1937, Brit-
ain begins to devolve political power in its Indian provinces to democratically elected provincial assemblies; the process of Indian independence begins, to be interrupted by World War II and the trauma of South Asian partition.

Sinha’s trajectory in India, though an important component of his tale, will seem opaque to many of my readers, and can only be very briefly summarized here. Let me just say that he divides his time between Tagore’s enterprise and Gandhi’s – which focused far more directly on manual labour – and that, shortly after Tagore’s death in 1941, the geopolitical catastrophe hits him directly. The partition riots force him, in December 1947, to leave his home in Sylhet, by then in East Pakistan, and to join a much abridged institutional set-up in Santiniketan.

In 1953, the United Nations, responding positively to an application from Sinha that included a ‘statement of purpose’ essay in Esperanto, agrees to fund a study tour by him through Switzerland, Britain, Sweden, Denmark and Norway for the purpose of coming up with concrete developmental projects on the basis of best practices available in social welfare schemes in those countries. We know from a Swiss Esperantist, Claude Piron, that Sinha, during his stay in Switzerland, walks into his (Piron’s) office and says, in slow but grammatically flawless Esperanto: “I have not spoken the language for seventeen years now, and am completely out of touch with the community. How are things?” The Esperanto-speaking community reconnects him with his reference groups; so does Leonard Elmhirst, whom he visits at Dartington Hall, Devonshire (recall that he had studied under Elmhirst’s guidance in 1923–26).

The inputs Sinha receives during his last trip to the West not only make possible an updated vision document that underpins his developmental efforts as a senior pedagogue and activist in India, but also represent the beginning of the Esperanto movement in Independent India. Sinha’s Esperanto library having perished in the fires of the partition riots of 1947 – he lost about seven thousand English books and three thousand Esperanto books – his correspondents in the 1950s and 60s help him to build a new, if far less comprehensive, collection in Esperanto. The narrative of Sinha’s efforts in Esperanto ends with the publication of Sinha’s translations from Tagore’s fiction, the establishment of his not very successful Bengal Esperanto Institute in 1963, and his autobiography – the source of this skeletal outline of his trajectory.

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8 Personal correspondence dated 1999.

9 Personal correspondence with Lakshmiswar Sinha, dated 1969 or so.

10 Tagore, Malsata ŝtono....

11 Sinha, Esperanto andolon....

12 Sinha, Jaroj sur tero....
After such a narrative, readers focused on Poška’s green preferences and wondering why I think Sinha was a kindred spirit, can be forgiven for thinking that there is nothing to re-contextualize – that Sinha was so firmly embedded in the context of naive developmentalism as to render any reinterpretation of the facts simply anachronistic. Are there any serious grounds for disagreeing with that judgment?

Adducing personal acquaintance as a basis for a different view does not sound like an appropriate move to make: readers would be in no position to contradict me if I were to base my claims on my 1968–74 conversations with Sinha. This is a scholarly article, whose author must refrain from reminiscing beyond necessity. This worry is misplaced, however; my position is that we must re-contextualize Sinha’s journey because of factors provided in the written record.

Sinha recounts certain consequences of the death of his parents’ third son – the brother born just before him. Sinha’s father loses interest in his brick factory; the agriculture that sustained the family does go on, but their income plunges. When Sinha graduates from middle school in 1917, his father suggests he should stay at home and learn farming and animal husbandry, taking private lessons on the side to augment his literacy. His father begins to write about agriculture, horticulture and the breeding of cows; Sinha produces longhand manuscript copies of these books, one of which gets published. In 1919, it is time to move on. His father has him admitted to a high school in Karimgunj, a larger town, where he stays with his uncle, and where wood is abundant and cheap. At this point Sinha decides to take up carpentry in earnest – in the face of social ridicule, for middle class boys are not supposed to morph into carpenters. Sinha turns out reasonably shaped tables and chairs, which he finds customers for. By the time Sinha travels to the nearby town of Silchar to watch an illustrious visitor, Mahatma Gandhi, in 1921, at the beginning of the campaign we associate Gandhi’s name with, Sinha is already making fifteen rupees a month, which he spends on books. He continues to do well at school and feels that, in terms of personal growth, he is ahead of his merely erudite peers. Explicit remarks elsewhere in the book stress that he insists on earning his livelihood as a carpenter throughout his career in Santiniketan and elsewhere in India.

This description indicates that as early as 1919, Sinha had moved into a manual labor mode quite similar to the life Poška had chosen for himself and recommended as a model for others to emulate. That mode of living makes far more sense today, in ergonomic terms, as one that ecological activists recommend to

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13 Sinha, Jaroj sur tero..., pp. 53–6.
make human life on the planet seriously sustainable. It is only a short step from this characterization of his livelihood choices to the conclusion that Sinha’s journey makes more sense in the context of our localistic and interlocal concerns today than in the heavy industrial-development-focused milieu of the times in which he happened to live. Workers in the field of development in contemporary India have moved far closer to Gandhi – with new hand-held electronic equipment making this agenda look realistic and postmodern – than the early, Nehruvian years of Independent India would have led observers to predict. Contemporary thinking in the Esperanto-speaking community is also far less committed to one-size-fits-all global solutions than the Esperanto ideologies Sinha was exposed to in his youth.

In other words, the re-contextualization of Sinha is a reasonably easy move to make: we can leave it as an exercise for the informed reader. All the reader has to do is to imagine him doing his thing today. The reader will see at once, without trying especially hard, that in such a counterfactual scenario Sinha looks optimally well adjusted, ceteris paribus, to a climate of opinion ready for his ideas, well adjusted to partners willing and able to work under his leadership.

Recent anniversaries have thrown up new writings about the history of Esperanto and major Esperantists. Scholars with access to Western libraries are likely to be able to supplement this study with actual references to Sinha’s works published in Sweden that I have no current access to. Such academics may well have a documentable basis for arguing that accounts of Sinha’s lectures available in Estonia or Latvia or England or Norway negate what I am saying about the localistic streak in Sinha’s paradigm. Such disagreement, if it emerges, is most welcome; Sinha spent many of his best years with Europeans, especially in northern Europe, and it would be most appropriate for them to have, if not the last word, at least the second word about how his journey is to be read from vantage points that seem natural today.

To return to Poška’s journey, my readers are now in a position to see more clearly that I have narrated the background and itinerary of Sinha’s journey from India to northern Europe precisely as an illuminating complement to what we need to understand in Poška’s journey from northern Europe to India. They were similar individuals; they were personal friends; by the time Poška and I were exchanging letters, Sinha was the only Indian Esperantist friend of his who was still alive and in touch with him. Obviously, the Sinha story makes a unique contribution to our understanding of Poška, now that we are trying to making an international effort to remember Poška, understand his legacy more vividly, and take up the thread of the efforts he regarded as important.
Sinha, like Poška, was working for a vision that we can articulate more clearly today in terms of languages as a basis for forward-looking, open communities. It is becoming clearer to most of us that all languages, all systems of education and cultural initiation, need to become far more open, flexible – and amenable to re-negotiation for social justice across privileged and underprivileged sections of the community – than the tradition-bound conventions of language, education and culture allow. We need to visualize Esperanto not just as one language designed to serve as a means for certain forms of international exchange. Esperanto, like the two-wheeler, is a green and innovation-laden idea that serves as a metaphor for the entire process. Poška, who rode and sailed over such incredible distances, was not just a friend of Sinha’s. They were pioneers together.

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In this article, I will try to reconstruct the views of Antanas Poška on India. Poška was a Lithuanian scholar and traveller, who undertook an extraordinary motorbike journey to India in 1929–36 and later became an undisputed authority on India in his native Lithuania. Putting Poška in the intellectual context of his time, I would argue that his views on India differed substantially from the prevailing European narratives of that period, as they extend beyond the typical binary “Europe vs. India” approach of the colonial era. Poška’s views lend us an alternative perspective, which is little known on the other side of the Himalayas. My research is based exclusively on Poška’s travel notes and his autobiography, which at the moment are only available in Lithuanian and therefore hardly familiar to a foreign reader.

Keywords: Europeans in India, Indian studies, colonialism, intellectual history

The beginning of the 20th century saw great numbers of Europeans visiting India. Apart from regular British civil and army officers and businessmen settled in India, there were travellers, explorers, scholars, adventure seekers, and relatives of the colonial settlers going on extended trips to the “Crown Jewel” of the British Empire.

Yet, despite being a renowned centre of learning for many centuries, India in the first half of the 20th century was hardly a destination for undergraduate European students. Even European children born in India would normally be sent to the boarding schools in the United Kingdom for education. Of course, there were Indologists coming to study India, but they mostly represented the caste of already matured scholars graduating from European universities. Most of them

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were either employed by the colonial structures or closely associated with these during their stay in India. The Indologists would usually form part of the ruling elite operating in the colonial framework and obliged to follow strict etiquette of the so-called “white race.” As European societies of that time were pretty status-conscious, even Indologists sympathetic towards India and Indians were mostly from well-to-do families, mindful of their status and interacting mostly with the higher strata of educated Indians.

In this context, Antanas Poška, a native of Lithuania, was a rather special case. He traveled to India on a motorbike, a most unusual way of traveling in the early 20th century, and his sole purpose was studies. Having reached India in 1931, he joined the University of Bombay, stayed in India for six years and left home in 1936 having earned his Bachelor and Master Diplomas and leaving the undefended doctoral thesis at the University of Calcutta.

The onset of World War II and the subsequent Soviet occupation of Lithuania prevented Poška from defending his PhD thesis and becoming an accredited Indologist. As a learned and traveled person who might pose a risk to Soviet integrity, Poška was arrested by the Soviet authorities and sent to the forced labor camps in Siberia. Later, this status of former prisoner precluded an academic career for him. But even without holding an academic title, he remained an undisputed authority on India for several generations of Lithuanians throughout the 20th century.
Countering the established stereotypes about Europeans in early 20th-century India, Poška emerges as a completely “different European” of that period. In the following chapter, I will try to unveil and explain the factors behind Poška’s unique views, including those on his “second homeland,” India.

A Different European

My analysis of Poška’s view on India is based on the approach of intellectual history and, especially, contextualism (as described by John Pocock and Quentin Skinner), which states that the subject of study can only be grasped in its particular historical context. This paper relies almost exclusively on Poška’s autobiography and his travel notes which were published several decades after his journey. Due to this reason, his views expressed some 70–80 years ago risk being transformed through the contemporary filter of my personal interpretation. There are also certain known difficulties relating to these notes. First, they were produced in the form of loose travel comments rather than a meticulous academic diary, hence, though scoring high on the emotional scale, they lack a systemic approach and proper chronology. Furthermore, part of the notes were lost during World War II and its aftermath, during Poška’s sentence in the Soviet forced-labour camps. The surviving pieces were put together for eventual publication only many decades later, when Poška was already an old man, increasingly oblivious of the particulars of his travel experiences. Some of Poška’s views were possibly misunderstood or misinterpreted by his editors who were unable to recover and reconfirm the exact flow of events.

The first important factor that has influenced Poška’s worldview is his origin. Poška was born in a nation that never acted as a colonial power and which at that time itself struggled with foreign oppression (of tsarist Russia). Also, he derived from a very humble background, a family of small-time farmers. Therefore, his approach towards India could not be, and never was, supercilious. Poška firmly believed in equality of all nations and races and human beings. It is obvious from Poška’s diaries that he never betrayed this belief, despite having lived in the colonial setup for a considerably long time. More so, he never hesitated to defend his views while in India, thus often causing discomfort to his fellow Europeans. His six-year-long stay in India had brought him in close contact with different strata of the local society, from servants to scholars to bureaucrats and maharajas and sadhus. His diaries provide ample descriptions of his friendships with different people in India. And yet, he remains highly critical of the manifestations of extreme inequality and social hierarchy that he witnessed during his stay, rejecting both the inferior status
attributed to Indians by the British, as well as the unbridgeable divides within Indian society itself.

The second important factor that has shaped Poška’s attitudes was his genuine interest in studying the linguistic and cultural affinities between Indians and Lithuanians. While the common root of all Indo-European languages was already established, the special link between Lithuanian and Sanskrit was still unexplored. It is important to stress that to Poška these cultural and linguistic affinities bore a personal significance rather than being a mere strange and exotic phenomenon (like it was to most Europeans). The obvious, yet mysterious relationship with the ancient Indian civilization was an important element of national pride for a young Lithuanian nation. A native Lithuanian speaker himself, Poška was tempted by the prospect of personally contributing to the development of Lithuania’s new national identity.

To better understand the genesis of Poška’s views, two different historical contexts must be taken into account. First, the historical time under Poška’s early formative years; second, the historical context of the 1930s, which was an extremely dramatic and game-changing decade globally. The larger part of the thirties Poška spent in India; therefore, it is also important to evaluate how this particular period could have shaped his views about the country.

Poška’s Formative Years
Poška was born in a small village of Gripkeliai in North Lithuania, then under Russian rule. Local resistance against foreign rule had always been very vocal and galvanized the intellectual life in Lithuania, despite two unsuccessful uprisings in 1831 and 1863. The emergent Lithuanian nationalism advocated the creation of an independent state free from any ties with either Russia or Poland, whose centuries-old political and cultural dominance over Lithuania was strongly disapproved of by the leaders of the pro-independence movement.

In 1904, a year after Poška was born, the ban on printing Lithuanian publications in Latin script was lifted. It had been imposed by Russia after the unsuccessful uprising of 1863, as an additional tool for expanding Russian cultural influence in Lithuania. However, this Lithuanian press ban had provoked diametrically opposite results. Printing of Lithuanian books and newspapers in Latin script started in neighboring Prussia (Germany), from

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1 For more than 200 years since 1569, Lithuania had lived as a constituent part of the Union State of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The Union State ceased to exist in 1795, when the three neighboring powers – the Russian Empire, the Kingdom of Prussia and the Habsburg Monarchy – partitioned and annexed its territories.
where they were secretly smuggled into Russian-occupied Lithuania. Poška’s father, a relatively well-educated peasant and carpenter, was very fond of these books and had access to them: “He loved these [books] and had quite a few of them as he cooperated with the book-smugglers from Prussia.” Little Antanas was taught reading at an early age. As Poška writes in his autobiography, his thirst for reading was huge. He used to memorize the text of books, as so few of them were available. Family resources were scarce; thus “luxury items” like books would always have to give way to more practical things used in farming.

Due to the proximity of the Latvian border Poška also picked up some Latvian at an early age. He also learned Russian in school at the age of six, and some German later, which he picked up from German soldiers during World War I. At the age of ten, he laid his hands on the textbook of Esperanto, which he memorized very quickly while tending to the sheep in the pastures. Little did he know then that Esperanto would become so instrumental in his future life and connect him to thousands of people around the world, including India.

Several jokes from Poška’s early life can be told to demonstrate the phenomenal effect of Esperanto on a village boy in the early 20th century. In his autobiography, Poška writes about meeting a German officer during World War I, who came to their house, found an Esperanto textbook there and addressed him, the fourteen-year-old, in this language. This happened in 1917. The German officer provided Poška with the contact list of the Berlin Esperanto Society, which also included “Polizei President Walter Stock” among its members. Poška wrote a letter to him and the head of the German police did reply! The other members of the Society also responded to Poška and put him in touch with the Esperanto people in Kaunas, the then provisional capital of Lithuania. Thus Poška got acquainted with the leader of the Lithuanian Esperanto movement, prelate Aleksandras Dambrauskas Jakštas, who immediately sent him some more material to study.

In 1919, Poška started a club of Esperanto in Saločiai, a small town near his native village, inviting other local boys to join. An anecdote tells us how the young Poška challenged the local priest who wasn’t happy with the village youth studying the language invented by a Jew (therefore Catholics were not supposed to study it!). Poška publicly asked the priest about the nationality of Jesus Christ, and the priest was dumbstruck and humiliated. Later Poška

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3 Ibid., p. 18.
even provided this priest with a letter from an Italian bishop M. E. Garolfi, a fan of Esperanto, with whom Poška corresponded. One can only imagine the conservative atmosphere in the Lithuanian province and the prejudices that Poška had to encounter.

The obstinate nature and desire to study estranged Poška from his family, which was against his further studies. His father wanted a helping hand on the farm and had no resources to support his son’s studies. Poška decided to move to Kaunas, with the hope of finding a job that would allow him to self-finance his university studies. His Esperanto connections again helped him a lot, especially in finding a place to stay and a few odd jobs to start with in the beginning.

Another passion unique to Poška was his thirst for travelling, something a farmer’s son permanently bound to the farmfield would hardly acknowledge. Poška recounts that his first-ever trip outside the perimeter of his village was in fact a military mission imposed by the German occupational forces during World War I. He, a boy of 11, had to take a batch of local men mobilized for the German army to the regional recruitment centre in Panevėžys, a journey of 60 kilometers one way. “This trip aroused a wish in me to see the world,” writes Poška. His second trip was again related to war-time duties – a forced labor stint in the construction of a railway line between Šiauliai and Biržai that the Germans were building. Poška was so impressed with the trip that he described it in great detail upon his return.

During his studies in Kaunas, Poška was in contact with the renowned Lithuanian poet Maironis, whose poetry about foreign lands stimulated his quest for travelling. In 1922, he visited Liepaja in neighbouring Latvia and finally traveled to Germany in 1923. It was there, at the International Esperanto Congress in Nuremberg, that he first met Indians, with whom he exchanged addresses for further correspondence.

Vytautas Šilas, a present-day leader of the Esperanto movement in Lithuania, concludes that Poška would have never accomplished his historical motorbike journey to India if not for Esperanto and the assistance of various Esperanto followers who helped him during the trip. We can only add that without Esperanto, this journey would probably have never started.

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4 Ibid., p. 17.
5 Ibid., p. 19.
6 Ibid., p. 29.
7 Ibid., p. 32.
8 Vytautas Šilas, Mokslo Lietuva....
Destination India

While studying in Kaunas, Poška was invited to the inaugural program of the Lithuanian Radio in 1926. The inaugural greetings were read out in nine languages, Esperanto among them. Poška was asked to read out the message in Esperanto. The Radio received a lot of supporting letters from its excited listeners and soon decided to start a regular Esperanto program on its waves. Poška started collaboration with it. He had to answer the questions of his Esperanto listeners from abroad who, many of them being linguists, were very keen to learn about the archaic Lithuanian language and its relationship with Sanskrit. In his effort to answer this question Poška unsuccessfully tried to find any material on the subject. After joining the Medical University in Kaunas he tried to dig for sources there, but to no avail. His professors only regretted the fact that no one in Lithuania had ever seriously studied the mysterious Lithuanian-Sanskrit connection. This prompted Poška to make a decision to go to India and study the linguistic connection himself, from first-hand sources. The scientific proof of it would have greatly served the needs of the young nation eager to reassert itself on the world map.

But the ambitious plan immediately ran into financial limitations. Poška came up with an idea of travelling by a motorbike as the most budget-friendly option. He had just completed his first motorbike journey around the Baltic Sea in 1927 and was awarded a monetary prize by a Belgian motorbike manufacturer, FN, for raising publicity of the brand. This encouraged him to write to FN and persuade them to give him a motorbike for his journey to India in return for the advertising he would do on his way. The company agreed and even instructed all FN offices to service his motorbike free of charge.

Poška dispatched a few letters to his Esperanto contacts in India, who duly replied that he was most welcome to come and study. The Parsi priest and head of the Parsi Panchayat, J. J. Moodi, assured him of his support. Poška’s own university promised him a scholarship upon his admission to the University of Bombay. Finally, Poška found a travel companion, a journalist Matas Šalčius, and the two set off on 20 November 1929.

Their ride through Central and Eastern Europe was a heartbreaking experience. On the one hand, road conditions were horrible, winter was setting in, and the poverty of the people on their way was appalling. On the other hand, the members of the Esperanto network in various countries received them with gen-

9 Antanas Poška, Mano gyvenimo pasaka..., p. 40.
10 Ibid., p. 42.
uine hospitality. Having spent 18 months on the road, they reached Iran. There Poška was struck down with malaria. His companion abandoned him, sold off their motorbike and went to India on his own. After his recovery, Poška too bought a seat on the ship to Bombay.

Arrival in India

Poška’s travel notes betrays his bewilderment during his first moments in India. He describes his emotions after disembarking from the ship in Bombay in great detail: the heat, the sea of people in the port, different shades of their skins, different styles of their clothes... One can sense a cultural shock in his description, partly caused by the fatigue of the long journey and partly by the hard-to-believe fulfilment of his dream. But there is also a feeling of a reunion with the “relatives” lost long time ago. Nothing in his notes reveals the typical colonial approach towards Indians, based on “otherness” and racially motivated attitudes. It may even look like Poška has landed in India unaware of the deep racial divide existing in the colonial world. But he must have been aware of it as he had spent over one year traveling in the Middle East. As the rest of Central and Eastern Europe, Lithuania too was for a long time cut off from European and global development. At the time of his journey, Poška, despite being an avid reader, had only limited formal education (he was a 3rd year student of medicine). Therefore, being unaffected by the ideological and racial bias prevalent in the European landscape of that time comes as a natural organic condition. His prior knowledge of India was derived not so much from Western academia but from his Indian Esperanto pen pals.

In his travel notes on the Middle Eastern leg of his journey, Poška describes meeting a group of European engineers employed in India. The engineers were utterly surprised to hear about his plans to study in India and aparently told him there was nothing to study in India as only savages lived there.11 It was with ease that Poška dismissed such racist talks as his first contacts among Indians were highly educated professors.

Immediately after arriving in Bombay, Poška went to see his first contact, A. K. Divekar, the Consul of Esperanto. He soon joined the University of Bombay.

Poška in India: New People, New Attitude

Before turning to a detailed account of Poška’s life and studies in India, one should take due note of another historical context that shaped Poška’s views

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11 Ibid., p. 53.
while in India, i.e. the overall atmosphere of the 1930s and 40s worldwide. These two decades were especially turbulent in the intellectual history of the 20th century. This was the time when ideas to be applied and implemented in a post-colonial world were brewed, developed, and exchanged internationally. The leaders of the future post-colonial nations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America at that time were still young people, either students or young intellectuals and activists, actively learning, travelling, and building their social networks. In Europe, a bunch of newly independent states had by then already sprung up, but their political leaders and the general public were still in the process of consolidating their newly acquired political and cultural identities. Reaching out in every direction possible was a natural thing to do. Poška’s trip to India is a living testimony to that. India too was brimming with new ideas. Its political leaders and intellectuals were extremely open to the outside world, eager to share their experience and looking for sympathy for their cause of full independence. Gandhi’s call for the boycott of the British educational institutions diverted many young Indians to European universities, especially German or Swiss ones, thus further contributing to their international exposure.

Poška was surprised, almost to the point of shock, that his first Indian professors and friends took such a deep interest in the developments in Europe, including Lithuania. The Polish-Lithuanian dispute over the jurisdiction of Vilnius, Lithuania’s historical capital, was known to his Indian friends. The difference between Latvians and Lithuanians might still have been confusing to them; yet
Poška remembers with admiration the passion with which he’d be questioned about Lithuania’s folklore and history. Poška discovered that his letters and articles on Esperanto, mailed from Lithuania to Bombay, were carefully studied and acknowledged. A. K. Divekar, the leader of the Esperanto movement in Bombay, even told Poška he had translated one allegorical story by a Lithuanian writer, Jonas Biliūnas, from Esperanto into Gujarati and sent it to the Mahatma.\(^\text{12}\)

Poška’s diary mentions an Anglo-Indian police officer on a ship to Bombay, who warned him against getting too friendly with the locals in India and reminded him of his duty to respect the honour of the “white man.” Yet, Poška states that he wants to do precisely the opposite: being aware of the resistance of Indians against British rule, he openly sympathizes with their freedom struggle.

Studies in Bombay opened up an entirely new world for Poška. After joining the University of Bombay as an undergraduate student of Sanskrit and Indian culture at the School of Economics and Sociology, Poška was taken under the mentorship of Dr. N. A. Thoothi, who became his first guide into the Indian way of life. Poška was invited to stay in Dr. Thoothi’s house in the then suburban Malad, in exchange for private Lithuanian language lessons. Poška accounts in great detail the peculiarities of Dr. Thoothi’s household and its surroundings; the habits of his professor and his domestic help; the ambiance of the Parsi community of Bombay and that of his University.

Vigorously encouraged by Dr. Thoothi, Poška soon took up anthropology as his main academic subject. This gave him a unique opportunity to join Sir Aurel Stein, a prominent Hungarian-British archaeologist, on his expeditions to Central Asia and the Himalayas. Poška’s task was primarily to do somathometric measurements of human skulls, but he was also exposed to archeology and took great interest in the local languages of the areas they visited. During these organized expeditions, as well as during his private trips to the Himalayas, Poška collected data about the Shina-language speaking peoples of North Western Himalayas (which later became the subject of his PhD thesis) and took special interest in their connections to Sanskrit and Lithuanian. He also visited the excavation site of Mohenjo-Daro while working with the well-known Australian archaeologist V. Gordon Childe.

Apparently, Poška’s Indian mentors were both forthcoming and accommodating. They tried to reciprocate his personal academic interests and provided the best of European and Indian methods of learning combined together. Poška eagerly opened himself to this ancient guru-shishya tradition. Of course,

the University of Bombay represented a Western academic institution; still, Poška’s diaries unveil his deep respect for the special bonding between the teacher and the student. At the same time, he was rather firm about his right to question his teachers. Word has it that Poška’s Indian professors must have had a good deal of patience with him initially.

Dr. Thoothi soon furnished him with a long reading list and also helped him get some books sent over from Lithuania. It appears that Dr. Thoothi was quite familiar with Lithuanian folklore and nurtured the idea of comparing it with Indian folk tales to trace the unique cross-cultural relationship that went beyond linguistic ties. It was Dr. Thoothi who directed Poška to read Jonas Basanavičius’s collection of Lithuanian fairy tales “Iš gyvenimo vėlių ir velnių” (On the Existence of Devils and Souls).  

Today it sounds like a joke that Poška had to cover thousands of miles to be told to study the works of his own fellow countryman.

But that only shows the scope of perplexity that Poška had to confront upon his arrival in India. All his initial goals had become mixed up. It was in India that Poška, a man restless by nature, came to learn the rigid discipline of academic life. His previous academic experience was limited to just two years of medical studies in Kaunas. Not surprisingly, Poška rather quickly rebelled against the academic rigidity, claiming his preference for “intuitive learning.” For example, once instructed by Dr. Thoothi to study and compare Indian and Lithuanian folk tales, he registered the following note in his diary: “But I came to India to study seriously! And now I’m told to read fairy tales!”

He wouldn’t hesitate to term the measuring of human skulls, a constituent part of his anthropological curriculum, as “boring.”

The studies in Bombay was a two-way street. The fact that Poška was the native speaker of Lithuanian was indeed appreciated at the University of Bombay. Lithuanian was already known among the linguists of India as the closest surviving sister of Sanskrit. At the same time, the chances of meeting a native Lithua-

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13 Antanas Poška, Nuo Baltijos iki Bengalijos, Vol. VI: Indijos Palmių paunksnėje..., p. 44.
14 Ibid., p. 43.
an speaker were extremely rare. Thus, a few professors seized the opportunity to learn Lithuanian from Poška.

After completing his Masters Degree in Bombay, Poška moved to Calcutta where he got employed at the Anthropological Laboratory of the Indian Museum. In Calcutta, Poška wrote his PhD under the prominent anthropologist Dr. B. S. Guha. He also attended the scientific expeditions to Burma and Nagaland organized by the Indian Museum. In 1935, along with the other young scholars of the Museum he joined a three-month expedition to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, led by the Australian scientist Dr. M. E. Smith. They traveled to different parts of the archipelago and studied the uncontacted tribes. Taking somathometric measurements was not easy; however, Poška successfully established contact with the local people and recorded valuable ethnographic information on their lifestyle, habits, and customs. Upon his return to the University of Calcutta he made an interesting presentation based on the data of his research.15

In both Bombay and Calcutta Poška quickly developed a wide circle of friends coming from his academic background and from outside. He would never turn down an invitation to visit their homes, where he would strike new friendships.

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and get an insider’s view of the life of an Indian family. In Poška’s archive, there are hundreds of photographs of himself hugging his Indian friends, a testimony of the warm and sincere relationships he managed to build.

One such photograph stands out from the other. It features Poška next to his portrait; the author of the painting is given as “Mr. Da Cruz.” It is my guess that this work belongs to Antonio Piedade da Cruz, one of the most prominent painters from Goa. Unfortunately, no evidence, factual or collateral, has survived about the making of this portrait. But it is quite unlikely that Poška, a man always short of money, would himself have commissioned that portrait. It is more likely that the painting was gifted to him by one of the most popular portraitists of Bombay of that time.

Dr. Thoothi is the first Indian described in Poška’s diary with such great fondness and love. There is also a photograph of a dhoti-clad Dr. Thoothi and Poška, the former leaning heavily on the latter and both smiling happily – a warm testimony of their close relationship.

Another Indian admired by Poška was Dr. J. J. Moodi, the Parsi high priest and a very respected leader of the Parsi community. It so happened that Dr. Moodi had visited Lithuania in 1895, befriended local people and got interested in Lithuanian. He researched the affinities between Persian and Lithuanian and considered the latter to be instrumental in establishing the real age of Avesta and Sanskrit. It is entirely to Dr. Moodi’s credit that the affinities between Persian and Lithuanian are well acknowledged today. After Dr. Moodi’s demise Poška published a touching obituary in the Lithuanian press, stating that Lithuania lost a true friend and supporter.

During his Calcutta years, Poška struck personal friendships with his colleagues at the Anthropological Laboratory of the Indian Museum and at the University of Calcutta. He befriended his fellow anthropologists Achutya Kumar Mitra, Bajra Kumar Chatterji, and also Tagore’s personal secretary Laksmiswara Sinha. A cordial relationship developed between him and the prominent

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17 Ibid., p. 17.
linguist, Suniti Kumar Chatterji, with whom he corresponded in later years and whom he even met during Chatterji’s trips to the Soviet Union in 1964 and 1966. It is interesting that the first encounter between the two did not score well: a copy of Chatterji’s postcard to Poška, dated 1934, tells us that Chatterji had initially refused a Lithuanian dictionary proposed by Poška as it was not in line with his own research interests. This initial failure notwithstanding, we know that later on Chatterji developed a profound interest in Lithuanian and in Baltic culture that resulted in a series of lectures on the Balts and the Aryans at the Shimla Institute of Advanced Studies, later compiled and published in a book, “Balts and Aryans in Their Indo-European Background.”

In defiance of the established practice of keeping within one’s own circle, Poška would always go off the beaten track to enlarge his experience. He would talk to professors and students, maharajas and sadhus, beggars and servants indiscriminately, and would readily jump on a travel adventure, had one crossed his way. Poška also describes his encounters with Indian royalty – his stay with the maharaja of Baroda, a hunting session with the maharaja of Indore, and several others. The descriptions expose Poška’s impatience and uneasiness at being trapped in royal protocol, and reassert his clear preference for uninhibited travelling in the company of ordinary people.

Since Poška’s goal of studying commonalities between Lithuanians and Indians was no secret to anyone, he was received by his Indian friends as a family member. Many considered him a distant relative from “the Artic Home of the Vedas,” as elaborately put by by Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak. Poška remembers himself:

“The British and the other Europeans avoided mingling with Indians; for them, honoring their reputation was a big thing. Indians were considered a lower race. However, Indian students regarded me as their ‘brother from the North’ and I felt comfortable with them. I was happy to make friends with their lot and collect information about their way of life. My efforts to learn more about Indians and better understand them...
were profoundly genuine, even though adjusting to the Indian norms and habits was not always easy.”

In his diary, Poška registers his displeasure with the behavior of fellow scholars of European origin from his Andaman and Nicobar expedition, mentioning they had acted like “demi-gods among savages.” During his presentation at the University of Calcutta, he even went as far as defending these “savages,” arguing that the only reason for their unfriendly response to foreigners was the maltreatment meted out to them by white colonizers.

Interactions with Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore
Poška's interactions with Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore deserve special mention as they have influenced Poška's views on India in a significant way. While in Bengal, Poška was encouraged by his friends to write articles for Indian newspapers. Most of Poška's writing was published by “The Modern Review,” a Calcutta-based monthly. One of the articles, “Lithuania: The Mystic Land of Songs,” published in 1934, was read by Tagore. As a result, the great Indian poet invited Poška to visit him at Shantiniketan and give a talk on Lithuanian culture and songs. Excited, Poška went to Shantiniketan during his holidays. He has left a detailed description of his stay with Tagore, which gives a somewhat controversial picture of the great poet. On the one hand, Tagore’s talent deeply moves Poška, but on the other, his bad temper and love for pompous rituals takes Poška aback. Their meeting started with a small incident. Poška, willing to please the poet, told him a number of his poems had been translated into Lithuanian. This piece of news enraged Tagore so much that he started accusing Poška of copyright infringement. After a while, the poet calmed down and explained to the surprised Lithuanian that Bengali was too difficult to be properly translated without consulting the author. Then a substantial discussion evolved about the grammatical peculiarities of Lithuanian and Bengali, after which Tagore admitted that perhaps Lithuanian was sufficiently accurate to convey the special feel of his Bengali verses. Tagore instructed Poška to carry out intuitive translations of his poems into Lithuanian.

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18 Ibid., p. 44.
19 Antanas Poška, Mano gyvenimo pasaka..., p. 104.
20 Antanas Poška, Nuo Baltijos iki Bengalijos, Vol. VIII: Per pietinę Indiją..., p. 27.
21 In his diary, Poška mentions dozens of articles published under his name in the Indian newspapers; however, part of them lack full bibliographical reference and therefore could not be traced for verification.
He later verified the translations simply by listening to the rhythm. By that time Poška had already picked up some Bengali to have a simple conversation, but hardly enough for sophisticated poetic translations. But Tagore didn’t speak Lithuanian either. Yet, he was adamant to continue the work and would protest angrily if he felt intonation falling astray during the reading session. During the two consecutive holiday stays at Shantiniketan Poška translated a good number of poems that were approved by the poet.22 Just before his return to Europe Poška visited Tagore again, to bid farewell. This last meeting prompted him to elaborate on Tagore’s behavior. Even though there were no other visitors, Tagore made Poška wait for three days before receiving him, and charged an unusually high fee for the meals and accommodation. Tagore also complained heavily about the Congress’ policies, as well as about the small honoraria that foreign publishers were paying him. Poška remembers he was so disheartened that he stopped short of asking Tagore to lend his publishing rights for Lithuania, as Lithuanian publishers were unlikely to pay even as much.23 Poška notes that for him, Tagore appeared as a tough if not greedy administrator, who favoured rich visitors over the others in the hope of increasing the flow of donations to support his university.24

The other great Indian, Mahatma Gandhi, Poška met twice. Their first meeting happened in 1931 – a brief exchange after a political rally that Gandhi addressed in Vila Parle, Bombay. Poška’s professors had introduced him to Gandhi as a student who was a great friend of India, interested in researching the Indo-Lithuanian connection. Gandhi replied that he was aware of this connection and called Lithuanians “an Indian tribe which moved back to the North; their language is older than Sanskrit.”25

Poška’s notes of 1931 also describe Gandhi’s “industry of souvenirs.” He writes anyone could get a tablecloth or a Gandhi cap in exchange for a small donation. To ensure that the souvenir was coming directly from the Mahatma’s hands, Gandhi would touch it or wear it briefly before handing it over to the recipient.26 Poška with great care preserved the souvenirs he received from the Mahatma, a homespun tablecloth with symbols of the freedom movement and a Gandhi cap. Both of them, along with the handwritten inscriptions in his diary, today are kept in the private collection of Poška’s family.

26 Ibid., p. 35.
The Mahatma told Poška to visit him again after he completes his studies in India. So, Poška went to see him in 1935, in Allahabad, and had a much longer discussion on colonial rule and the future of India. The Mahatma was increasingly somber, regretting the difficulties confronting India and pinpointing the caste system as the main culprit.\(^{27}\)

**Farewell to India**

Poška’s diary contains a rather emotional passage on his farewell to Calcutta. Below, it is presented in full length:

> “Calcutta has given me as much as Bombay, if not more. In Bombay, I started as a beginner; in Calcutta, I already worked as a scholar. I was thrilled to have known both the exhibits of the Indian Museum, and its people, whom I have worked together and who later became acknowledged anthropologists. I was happy in Calcutta – and how could I not be! There is a little piece of my work left there, brought from my expeditions to Baltistan and many other places. And my associates – professors, assistants – what a precious people they were! They corrected my English in my reports, they guided me through the historical places of Bengal, and they also told me the horrible stories of great disasters, of how flooding would claim the entire harvest, leaving only two options for the poor local people: survive till the next season on a handful of rice, or die of starvation... But at the same time, my associates never lacked a sense of humour. They never lost their Bengali sincerity, so passionately described by Tagore. How shall I bid my farewell to all of them without giving up to emotions, without shedding a tear – especially realizing that I will never come back and will never see them again!”\(^{28}\)

Poška’s farewell to the University of Bombay was equally emotional. Poška visited his professors and friends; he climbed the library tower – his favourite hideout during the studies – and shook hands with all the local attendants and servants. Since he was going home overland, via Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey, his last steps in India were at the Khyber Pass after which his diary records: “God bless you, India! You were my homeland for seven years, you have given me education and enriched my life.”\(^{29}\)

\(^{27}\) Ibid., p. 37.

\(^{28}\) Ibid., pp. 27–8.

\(^{29}\) Ibid., p. 42.
Back Home – Status of Indologist Denied

After his return from India Poška nurtured plans to go to London to defend his PhD thesis. But World War II and the subsequent occupations of Lithuania forced him to drop this idea. Before the Soviets entered and forcefully annexed Lithuania in the summer of 1940, Poška had already published hundreds of media articles on India and was preparing to publish his travel diaries. However, the Soviet regime regarded him as a dangerous man: he was well educated, spoke several foreign languages, and had friends abroad. Moreover, as a librarian of the Vilnius Public Library he refused the orders to destroy books listed as “anti-Soviet.” With this personal record, Poška was soon arrested and, like hundreds of thousands of fellow Lithuanians, sent to forced labour camps in Siberia and Central Asia. There he spent more than a decade. Despite being rehabilitated after Stalin’s death in 1953, Poška was not allowed to return to Lithuania and was confined to obligatory settlement in the Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Only in 1959 was he allowed to come back. The status of a former political prisoner had ostracised him completely: he was suspended from teaching at the university and the publishing of his books was forbidden. Yet, despite these Soviet efforts to break him, Poška remained the foremost authority on India for many generations. He was especially popular with young people who would come to see him at home to learn about his life in India. As one such visitor, a student at the Vilnius Pedagogical University at that time, told me, Poška would always be very happy to receive students and tell them about India; he would also show them “a souvenir from Gandhi,” a khadi tablecloth he had brought from Bombay and preserved during the years of captivity, and would tell his visitors to touch it: “Touch it, it still contains Gandhi’s energy.”

Poška’s stories of India offered solace and hope – and a gulp of freedom – to all those young minds who could only dream of crossing the outer perimeter of the impermeable Soviet border.

Conclusions

While stating that Poška escaped the colonial binary opposition characteristic of the prevailing European attitude towards India in the early 20th century, we must also admit the presence in him of other contradictions typical to a European scholar of that period. Poška was rather vocal in criticizing things he considered irrational and mystical. He believed they needed to either be explained ration-

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30 Recounted by one such visitor to Poška’s house and a personal friend, Ms. Aušra Narbutaitė.
ally or rejected. He thought that many of the traditional knowledge systems of India, like Ayurveda, were just an ancient residue to be discarded. For example, in his description of the medicine market of Bombay full of fakirs, healers and charlatans who treat people by means of traditional medicine, Poška is especially critical and sarcastic.31

Yet, a moment spent in the Himalayas watching the meditating Tibetan monks melts his rational heart and he records in his diary: “That evening I felt the mysterious spirituality of space and material.”32 And he remained as convinced as ever of the deep-rooted spiritual connection between Lithuanians and Indians.

Poška was open in exposing the prejudices that Europeans had about Indians, as well as the ones Indians had about Europeans. In his diary he records a conversation with an Indian student who thinks that Europeans are the most savage people in the world – they sleep on high beds, they share the same spoon, etc. Poška calls it a “typical example of misunderstandings arising out of ignorance,” which can be easily resolved by taking a closer look into cultural and climatic differences of Europe and India.33 But mostly Poška is critical of Indians of high classes blindly imitating Europeans, forgetting their own heritage. Visiting the courts of some maharajas he observes the passion of Indian rulers for European luxury or collectible items, though most of these are possessed without truly understanding their purpose or true historical background. Yet, he deeply admired the educated Indians who wanted to contribute to the rebirth of India.

Several aspects distinguish Poška from the mainstream of Europeans in India of the early 20th century. First, he chose to study in India at a time when Indians elites were seeking education in Europe. He saw it as his mission to study the linguistic and cultural commonalities between Lithuania and India. Second, he built his attitudes towards Indians on the presumption of equality of all races and ethnic groups. This clashed with the prevailing racist colonial norms, wherein Europeans largely subscribed to the popular theory of racist supremacy. Poška was certainly a minority in this respect, yet it proves that in some (at least Central Eastern European societies) India was never considered a passive entity that was to be controlled, but rather as an independent cultural realm, a great civilization that had its full right to political independence. It was fashionable for the citizens of young Lithuania to take pride in the linguistic commonalities with India.

Yet, while questioning and criticizing the irrational mystical elements of Indian society and culture, Poška remained a typical product of “rational Europe,” who thought that either the mystical elements had to be scientifically explained or rejected straight away in the 20th century.

It seems to me that Poška was able to grasp India in all her contradictions: spiritual yet practical, religious yet material, ancient yet young. Being largely immune to colonial mindset, he did occasionally succumb to the trap of a “rational European”; yet he remained sufficiently sensitive to Indian spirituality and thus combined perfectly the best of Western and Indian methods of thinking and learning.

The journey to India marked Poška for life and turned out to be his trademark. The effect India had on Poška in his later years, after he survived captivity in Stalin’s forced labour camps and returned to Lithuania, is unique – his representation of India as the ray of solace and hope for himself and his enslaved countrymen played an important role at that time and continues to inspire today. Poška’s respect and admiration for India shaped several generations of Lithuanians, generating enormous interest in a faraway culture and warm feelings for the Indian people. Thus, first representing a different European in India, he later became a special agent for India in Soviet-occupied Lithuania and firmly tied the two distant nations together. It is especially heartening that the University of Calcutta recognized Poška’s contribution to both Indology and Indo-Lithuanian relations and conferred a Doctor of Literature Honoris Causa Degree on him, posthumously, in 2014.

And last but not the least: it is obvious that Poška’s job of researching Indo-Lithuanian connections remains an unfinished business and must be continued.

**Bibliography:**


Influence of Gandhian Principles of Non-Violence in the Singing Revolution (Sąjūdis Movement) of Lithuania

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The Singing Revolution (Sąjūdis Movement) means a non-violent freedom struggle of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia for liberation from the authoritarian regime of the Soviet Union. It is an inspiring precedent of non-violent political action in the late 20th century, in which people’s power and their strong desire for independence manifested themselves through songs and culture. Although the culture of non-violence had been deep-seated in the Lithuanian society in the forms of songs, religious philosophy and traditions since time immemorial, the successful application of the Gandhian principles in the freedom struggle of India encouraged the leaders of Sąjūdis to formulate their own strategy and methods of mass mobilization along the lines of these principles. The key determinants which had motivated the leaders of Sąjūdis to adopt the Gandhian ways of resisting the Soviet authorities were: historical linkages, cultural and linguistic ties between India and Lithuania, popularity of Hindu philosophy and religion among the Lithuanian intellectuals, and the success stories of non-violent struggle in India and elsewhere in the world. However, it also remains true that all the proceedings of the Singing Revolution is a product of the unprecedented solidarity of the Lithuanian people and their unwavering commitment to the non-violent means of regaining the national freedom.

The people of Lithuania, along with Latvia and Estonia, had waged several violent and non-violent struggles at different phases of foreign occupation, subjugation and domination of their countries. However, the independence of the Baltic States in late 20th century not only was a watershed in their historical development, but also “stands as a major milestone in the history of modern world.”¹ It epitomized the non-violent “people’s power” that undermined the Soviet rule and finally played a very significant role in the disintegration and collapse of the Soviet Union.² What is also important is that people’s non-violent aspirations for the restoration of their freedom were voiced through the national cultures and patriotic folk songs, which were banned earlier under the Soviet regime.

It was the leaders of the Sąjūdis movement in Lithuania who shifted the techniques, methods and strategies from violent to non-violent to achieve national independence. Through the activities of Sąjūdis, Gandhian principles of non-violence have re-emerged as a strong driving force in the formulation of strategies, methods and tactics of mass mobilization.

This great historical phenomenon, wherein common people and political activists drew their spiritual and moral strength from the national culture, including folk songs, is widely known as the “Singing Revolution.” Its non-violent methods and tactics of struggle starkly resemble Mahatma Gandhi’s principles of satyagraha, but other successful examples of non-violent movements have also played their role. At the same time, the non-violent character of Lithuania’s freedom struggle is hardly the product of the 20th century alone, as the elements of non-violence are deeply embedded in the rich history, “culture, and its symbolic expression” of the three Baltic states. Clemens argues that the “survival of the Baltic peoples and their emergence as independent states in 1920 and re-emergence in 1991 resulted from various forms of soft power, skilfully converted to undermine foreign rule and promote self-rule.” Thus, the power of culture culminated in the mass collective singing during public demonstrations, in the revival of public interest in the ancestral past, and in open celebration of the previously outlawed public holidays, to mention just a few. Moreover, in their effort to underline the non-violent experiences of the past, the Baltic artists and painters transformed the images of the legendary Son of Kalevi and the Bearslayer from being militant heroes into “more humane – even gentle and self-sacrificing – human creatures.” The ultimate goal of this cultural revivalism was to enhance the feeling of national awakening and gradually develop the non-violent potentials among the common people.

Any non-violent movement requires a focal point of interaction where people could rally and share their cultural and historical commonalities, as well as bitter grievances of the day. Through this interaction, people come to learn and realize the evils of their current rulers and are inspired to prepare themselves for the

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3 The Lithuanian revival movement (Lietuvos Persitvarkymo Sąjūdis), largely known as “Sąjūdis,” was a mass organization established in 1988, of various social and political groups of Lithuanians, including nationalists, liberal intellectuals and communist reformers.

4 C. Walter Clemens Jr., Culture and Symbols as Tools of Resistance..., pp. 169–177.


6 Bennich Björkman Li, The Cultural Roots of Estonia’s Successful Transition..., pp. 316–347.

7 They were epical and mythological heroes in the Baltic history. There are many collections of songs in which their heroic stories had been praised.

8 Guntis Šmidchens, National Heroic Narratives in the Baltics..., pp. 484–508.
collective confrontation against the evil-doers. Mahatma Gandhi always emphasized the importance of the power vested in every individual: “In politics, [the use of nonviolent action] is based upon the immutable maxim that government of the people is possible only so long as they consent either consciously or unconsciously to be governed.”\(^9\) If the people refuse to cooperate with the government, that government will not hold. Therefore, the success of non-violent action requires in the first place an increased level of consciousness among common masses, which in its turn helps to discover the real relationship between the ruler and the ruled.

Equally important to the success of non-violent action is its “adequate organizational support and firm ideological control,”\(^10\) two key measures to prevent violent confrontation. The movement also requires proper training of the volunteers (or Satyagrahis, as Gandhiji called them), who must be prepared to bear suffering without fighting back. With these parameters in place, the non-violent struggle could be as adequate and effective as its less peaceful alternatives. According to Gražina Miniotaitė, a Lithuanian scholar, “Gandhi was among the first national leaders to show both in theory and in action that non-violent struggle is a positive force that can be successfully used in conflict [resolution].”\(^11\) In this regard, the liberation movement of Lithuania remains a successful example of the late 20\(^{th}\) century non-violent movements.

For the Baltic people, the focal point of interaction became their history and bitter experience under the Soviet occupation regime. Political activists, artists and intellectuals successfully reached out to the public via public meetings and demonstrations, literary societies, art and song festivals, etc. The mass media played a particularly important role. Its members not only ensured effective communication between the masses and the leaders, but also themselves advocated non-violent action: “Journalists saw themselves as centrally involved in the nonviolent movement regardless of whither their political loyalties leaned.”\(^12\) The media developed into a key forum of public debate over the crimes and brutalities of the Soviet regime. The Baltic people also started reviving their pre-World War II experiences to reconnect with the “golden age” of independence in 1918–1940, which was largely forgotten by the rest of the world. A legend was built and massively exploited that “during this period, the Baltic States were among the world’s most democratic


\(^10\) David Arnold, *Gandhi: Profiles in Power…*, p. 112.


nations: parliament held the upper hand in state politics, national institutions were built, and the national minorities held civil rights and participated in public life.”

Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia had fallen victim to the expansionist policies of their bigger and highly aggressive neighbours. In 1940, they were incorporated into the Soviet Union on the basis of the secret Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, which was later denounced by the Soviet Union itself. Under the Soviet rule, the Baltic people had to undergo terrible experiences of torture and repression, mass deportation to Siberia, and forceful suppression of national ideals. Thus, in 1940–1941 alone, the Soviets deported or executed almost 34,000–75,000 Lithuanians. The aggressive policies of Russification, Sovietisation and heavy industrialization brought with them political, economic and cultural devastation.

In 1944, when Lithuania was retaken by the Soviet Army, the scale of repression only intensified. Another 1,30,000 people were deported to Siberia before Stalin’s death in 1953. Thousands chose to flee to the woods where they joined the guerrilla movement, the so-called “Forest Brothers.” In 1945, an estimated 30,000 armed men lived in small units in the woods, attacking and harassing Soviet forces, functionaries, and their Lithuanian collaborators. In addition, there were numerous other, smaller underground activist groups undertaking spontaneous acts, like distribution of anti-Soviet leaflets and defacing Communist symbols. Thus, in the beginning, the anti-Soviet resistance in Lithuania was simultaneously violent and non-violent.

Despite surviving till the mid-1950s, the longest survival record in Central and Eastern Europe, Lithuania’s guerrilla war was eventually suppressed by the Soviet forces. However, peaceful resistance continued, driven mainly by dissident groups demanding religious, cultural and human rights. The Lithuanian Catholic Church, itself under tremendous pressure, emerged as its key

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13 Kevin O’Connor, *The History of the Baltic States*.
14 The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between Nazi Germany and Soviet Union signed on 23 August 1939 divided the Baltic region in the “spheres of influence.” The secret “additional protocol” of the 1939 Pact assigned Estonia and Latvia under the Soviet sphere of influence, while Lithuania was left to Germany. Lithuania was later transferred to the Soviet sphere in exchange for a larger hunk of Poland in which Germany attacked Poland on 1 September 1939.
17 The Forest Brothers were Lithuanian partisans and freedom fighters who had withdrawn to the forests due to the suppressive and oppressive rule of Soviets. Since the re-occupation of Lithuania in 1944, they strongly opposed it and formed violent resistance groups and adopted guerrilla tactics to fight against the Soviet authorities.
platform and unifying force. In 1968, a Moscow-based group of dissidents started publishing the *Chronicle of Current Events*, and soon were followed by local publications in Lithuanian language “*Varpas*” (The Bell) and “*Perspektyvos*” (Perspectives).

Despite the ongoing resistance, the Baltic nations were brought more and more tightly under the Soviet control. The Soviet Union followed the policy of Sovietization, which, among other things, included strict surveillance of all cultural and political activities, as well as all-pervasive state presence in such sectors as sports, education, religion, and even family life. The Russian language was imposed. Censorship, and even self-censorship, had become routine. Civil society, in effect, was dismantled. People were not allowed to take part in social and cultural events of their choice, especially those which were believed to promote national feelings. Everyone had become a suspect: former landowners, farmers, teachers, businessmen, intellectuals. Citizens failing to prove their loyalty were arrested, in some cases shot without proper trial. In other cases, they were sent to the Gulag as enemies of the state, and only few returned.

Under the Soviet occupation, the Lithuanian Catholic Church remained the only national institution which would openly oppose Russification and would fight to defend Lithuanian culture, values and traditions. Perceiving the Church as “a major obstacle to Russification and the arch-opponent of Soviet ideology,” the Soviet authorities launched a large-scale campaign “War against God,” as a result of which a large number of priests were arrested, imprisoned, deported to Siberia or executed. The Church’s properties were massively nationalized.

All these efforts had one clear goal: to break the backbone of the Lithuanian society by undermining its national language, identity, culture and traditions, by imposing Russian language, collectivization, and repression on those who did not follow orders. According to Tarulis, “There was a loss of population of one million people between 1939 and 1959, resulting from deportations, executions, the Holocaust, mass emigration, and the resulting reduction in the

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21 Ibid, p. 129.
22 Graham Smith, *The Baltic States*....
23 Aldis Purs, *Baltic Facades*..., p. 54.
24 Ibid.
The Soviet policies crippled the foundations of Lithuanian society and left it in a social and economic mess. Naturally, this situation could not last forever. The Soviet occupation had already provoked seething discontent among the general public, reinforced by the reckless decisions of the Soviet authorities. The dissident groups were growing increasingly vocal about massive human rights violations, as well as the indiscriminate approach towards the natural environment. The latter deserves special attention as “the collective emotional attachment of people to their habitat (...) [can also] become the [driving force of] nationalism.”

The increasing environmental degradation due to massive industrialization and collectivization proved yet another failure of the communist rule.

In the mid-1980s, this widespread dissent and concern expressed by artists, intellectuals and the vocal Lithuanian diaspora abroad, coalesced and translated into a powerful pro-reform movement. At that time, the Soviet economy was in deep crisis and its international image was severely dented by the invasion in Afghanistan. In 1985, Gorbachev was elected the secretary general of the Communist Party and launched a major overhaul of the entire governance system under such signature programs as *Perestroika* (restructuring) and *Glasnost* (openness).* These reforms gave the local dissidents an unprecedented opportunity. Thus, in the wake of the Chernobyl disaster, peaceful and non-violent protests started in Lithuania against the expansion of the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant, a Chernobyl-type installation just 80 miles away from the capital city of Vilnius. The construction of Unit-3 was effectively suspended and later terminated. The success of this environmental movement served a larger purpose by boosting the feelings of self-confidence and national dignity among the Lithuanian public.

The rapidly growing number of public meetings, mass demonstrations, and cultural events and festivals in the late 1980s is a powerful manifestation of the national Awakening that was happening at that time. Intellectual groups, literary and scientific circles took the lead in openly debating future goals of the nation. It was clear that the time had come to revive and restore the national culture, identity and, ultimately, political independence. The ideas of

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regaining independence through the revival of national cultures, along with the rejection of the brutality of the Soviet rule, were common to all three Baltic States and helped them in their mass mobilization.32

The Sąjūdis movement of Lithuania epitomizes this epoch at its best. It was founded by a group of writers, artists, journalists, scholars, architects, musicians, and philosophers, many of whom were also Communist Party members, under the slogan of “openness, democracy, and sovereignty.”33 Within a short period of time, the movement spread to every corner of Lithuania and received massive public support. “With each newspaper article and public demonstration the sense of solidarity and shared ideas became more intense.”34 Significantly, Sąjūdis always stressed the prevailing importance of non-violent means to achieve national goals. Attempts were made to underline the “non-violent character” of the Lithuanian culture, as “songs and singing [have always been] the nation’s preferred “weapons.”35 The song festivals, the massive public festivals started in the early 1920s and somehow surviving through the Soviet occupation, were used as an instrument to connect the hearts of every individual, irrespective of their ethnicities. Their role should not be underestimated. The songs gave power and stimulus to the people to stick together and jointly fight totalitarian oppression.

However, to keep the freedom struggle within the framework of non-violent political action, the Sąjūdis’s activists had to partially borrow the ideas and tactics from the other great leaders and freedom movements worldwide.36 Mahatma Gandhi’s pragmatic approach applied during the Indian freedom struggle was a natural and obvious choice. Gandhi’s charismatic personality, as well as ancient cultural and historical connections shared by India and Lithuania,37 added to the resolve of Lithuanian political and intellectual elites to opt for non-violent solutions during their nation’s Singing Revolution. To better understand the Lithuanian Singing Revolution, here is a brief summary of Gandhi’s principles and political strategies that he applied in the Indian freedom struggle.

32 Jay Ulfelder, Baltic Protest in the Gorbachev Era…, pp. 23–43.
33 Gražina Miniotaitė, Non-Violent Resistance in Lithuania…, p. 29.
34 Thomas Lane, Lithuania: Stepping Westward, p. 101.
37 Ibid.
The Gandhian Principles of Non-Violence

Mahatma Gandhi, known as the father of Indian independence, has turned out to be a strong inspiration for non-violent socio-political movements around the world. However, the Gandhian principle of non-violence (Ahmisa), a central ideal of his political philosophy, is not his innovation; the ideas that shaped Gandhian non-violence were drawn both from Western and Indian sources. The trial of Socrates as described in Plato’s Apology had a deep impact on Gandhi. The moral principles of the Sermon on the Mount, as interpreted in Leo Tolstoy’s (1893) The Kingdom of God Is within You, had a lifelong hold on him. A Letter to a Hindu (1908), as well as direct correspondence with Tolstoy, also influenced Gandhi’s views on non-violence. Tolstoy through his letters encouraged Gandhi in his struggle in Transvaal, South Africa. The substantial contribution which he made to the philosophy of non-violence is his innovation in the methods and technique of non-violent resistance, as well as its systematic application “in the individual, social and political life of man, the national state, revolution, international intercourse, international organization and the new world order.”

He himself accepted that “I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and Non-violence are as old as the hills. All I have done is to try experiments in both on as vast a scale as I could.” Moreover, he was not an academic theorist and his philosophical formulations of non-violent political action were based on day to day practices. He always emphasized the selection of right means. According to Richard Deats, “Gandhi was the combination that made means and ends consistent and powerful.”

His political philosophy of non-violence, as the moral opposite of violence, was based on the pragmatic consideration about the most effective ways to mobilize popular power, and to resist and replace authoritarian and undemocratic regimes and protect fundamental rights. This popular power was vested in the “collective actions of citizens whom Gandhiji considered superior to the state.” He propounded an action-oriented philosophy, suggesting the reconstruction of modern civilization, a reconstruction based on universal

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38 Leo Tolstoy, A Letter to A Hindu...
39 The TBIA (Transvaal British Indian Association), later known as TIC (Transvaal Indian Congress), was formed in 1903 by Mahatma Gandhi to protest against the anti-Indian legislation in the area. The organization depended on petitions and deputations to the authorities and appeals for help to the Government of India, which was then under British control. The TBIA was involved in the Gandhi’s passive resistance campaigns of 1908 and 1913.
40 Gopi Nath Dhawan, The Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi..., pp. 626–7.
41 Richard Deats, Active Non-Violence across the World....
42 Gene Sharp, The Politics of Non-Violent Action....
truth and the power of non-violence, which he considered very near to God. Mahatma Gandhi’s opening words of his defence speech at his trial at Ahmedabad, namely: “Non-violence is the first article of my faith; it is also the last article of my creed,” reveals his deep-seated faith in non-violence. As a worshipper of Satya and Abhima (truth and non-violence), he trained and inspired his followers during the Indian freedom struggle. He utilized the strategy of non-violence as a weapon for liberating the Indian masses from British domination. By promoting non-violence as a political philosophy, Gandhi transformed his ideas into political action to defy the injustice and coercive power of the British Empire.

The unique thing proposed by Gandhi was his efforts to make non-violent means accessible to any common individual. By following certain vows, called Vrata, one could purify himself and prepare himself to counter wrongdoers without causing them any physical harm. These vows were: 1) the vow of truth, 2) of non-violence, 3) of celibacy, 4) of control of the palate, 5) of non-stealing and 6) of non-possession. According to Anima Bose, “these vows were the process of building consciousness of moral justice among the practitioners of Satyagraha,” in order to keep them within the ambit of non-violent action. Furthermore, each individual must be the master of his own conscience: “Every man has to obey the voice of his own conscience and be his own master......such a man is superior to all governments.” The disciplined and conscious individuals would not allow any coercive power to take over their conscience; they have the potential to established self-rule. He argues, “An armed man naturally relies on his arms. A man who is intentionally unarmed, relies upon the unseen force called the truth force.” The manipulation of political power could be challenged by the active non-violent power of self-purified individuals. Godrej argues that non-violent action “is neither violent nor does it require brute, martial strength, but rather relies on disciplined and conscious self-scrutiny, sacrifice, and the capacity to endure embodied pain through self-suffering.”

The methods and techniques which Gandhi employed and popularized among the Indian masses during the Indian freedom movement were Sat-

43 Mahatma Gandhi, Young India, 1922.
47 Mahatma Gandhi, Harijan, 28 June 1942, p. 201.
48 Farah Godrej, Gandhi’s Corporeal Non-Violence..., p. 3.
yagraha (hold to the truth), non-cooperation and civil disobedience. Satyagraha is a tactic which excludes the use of violence. It requires higher morality and spirituality built through courageous and voluntary self-suffering and self-sacrifice. The physical injury done to a Satyagrahi only reinforces the power of his soul. In the words of Martin Luther King, “a man who is prepared to suffer shall be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope.”

Gandhi believed that the suffering a Satyagrahi voluntarily undergoes to convert an opponent is consistent with the pursuit of truth to change the heart. “The Satyagrahi’s course is plain... He must know that his suffering will melt the stoniest heart of the stoniest fanatic.”

It requires higher morality and spirituality which need much courage and voluntary self-suffering and self-sacrifice. As a method, it works in arousing the “consciousness of the masses; continuing education; maintaining the unity of the sufferers and making them into fearless soldiers; providing them a powerful organization and throwing them in heroic battles.”

Before coming to India, Gandhi first used the strategy of Satyagraha in South Africa. This was the first real mass movement of civil disobedience led by Gandhi that was successful in bringing about the peaceful change in South Africa. Dalton noted that South Africa became “the laboratory of Gandhi’s experiments; it proved an excellent testing ground, since many of the problems which he later found in India occurred there in miniature.”

In 1915, Gandhi returned to India and in 1918, he started using the non-violent methods in Champaran in Bihar and Kheda in Gujarat to protect the rights of peasants. His campaign was so successful that the British government was forced to change the laws for Indigo farmers. From these initial small-scale agitations Gandhi realized that the only way to earn the respect and attention of British officials was to actively resist the government through civil disobedience. Some of the important Satyagraha movements led by Gandhi, including Rowlett Satyagraha 1919, Salt Satyagraha in 1930 and Quit India Movement in 1942, continued in the form of non-cooperation and civil resistance.

Other important instruments of non-violent political action employed by Gandhi were non-cooperation and civil disobedience (civil resistance). The

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50 Mahatma Gandhi, Young India, 1925, p. 189.
51 Y.V. Satyanarayana, Ethics: Theory and Practice..., p. 35.
basic ideas at the heart of non-cooperation and civil disobedience are to withdraw all kinds of support, cooperation and association with the authoritarian ruler; and to not obey the suppressive, oppressive and immoral laws: “non-cooperation with the aggressor, denying him control over social institutions.”

He advocated that the ultimate source of power of any ruler is the consent of the people; if they will withdraw their support, no government would stand for a very long time. Gandhi expressed his views: “I believe, and everybody must grant that no government can exist for a single moment without the cooperation of the people, willing or forced, and if people suddenly withdraw their cooperation in every detail, the government will come to a standstill...”

During the freedom movement of India, in a special session held in Calcutta in September 1920, the Indian National Congress, inspired by Gandhi, adopted its famous resolution on non-cooperation, which recommended the renunciation of government titles and the boycotting of the legislatures, law-courts and government educational intuitions leading up at a later date to the non-payment of taxes.

Gandhi applied the methods of mass communication for promoting the ideas of non-violence and Satyagraha through mass meetings and personal writings published in Young India and Harijan. Despite British control over the press, the Indian media played an active role in mobilizing the masses and propagating Gandhian ideas among the Indian people. Moreover, Gandhi set up volunteer training camps, such as Sabarmati Ashram, to teach Satyagrahis about non-violent methods and strategies. To promote the idea of non-violence, Gandhi used culture and Indian traditions as instruments to bring communal harmony among different socio-political and religious sections of society. He organized Prarthana Sabhas (Prayer assemblies) in which he, with his followers, used to sing harmonious songs. Patriotic poems like “Vande Mataram” (Salute to Mother India) and the Indian national anthem “Jan Gan Mann Adhinayak,” written by Bankimchandra Chatterjee and Rabindranath Tagore respectively, served as a reservoir of moral strength and solace during the darkest hours of civil resistance. The symbolic images of “Bhaya Maa-ta” (Mother India), the portrayal of the tri-colour as the national flag, and the commemoration of historical events and celebration of cultural traditions stimulated the self-consciousness about Indian nationhood.

53 Gražina Miniotaitė, Civil Disobedience: Justice against Legality..., pp. 21–3.
54 Mahatma Gandhi, 1920, quoted in: Gražina Miniotaitė, Civil Disobedience: Justice against Legality..., pp. 21–3.
Following Gandhi’s call to withdraw from state institutions and instead join national schools, several students left their schools. The *Swadeshi* (national) spirit was revived with new force, this time as part of a nationwide struggle. Boycott of law courts by many leading lawyers of the country like C. R. Das, Motilal Nehru and Asaf Ali, became a source of inspiration for many other people in India. In fact, the boycott of foreign clothes was also very successful. Volunteers went from house to house collecting outfits made of foreign cloth; the entire community would collect them to eventually incinerate them in a bonfire. Picketing of shops selling foreign cloth was also a major form of protest. Moreover, Gandhi inspired people to wear *Khadi* (locally made cotton) as a part of the *Swadeshi* campaign. Under the guidance of Gandhi, *Charkha* (an instrument of cotton spinning) and Indian handloom products regained repute among the Indian people. Public transport and English-manufactured goods, especially clothing, were boycotted. The success of the movement was a total shock to the British authorities and a massive encouragement to millions of Indians.

Besides the breaking of the Salt Laws, the civil disobedience program also included: picketing of shops selling foreign goods and liquor, refusal to pay taxes, avoidance of their offices by public officers and British schools by students. Even women joined the ranks and actively resisted British rule. The movement gained massive popular support. During the “Dandi March,” another landmark event of civil disobedience, seventy-eight members of Sabarmati Ashram representing every region and religion of India joined Gandhiji in his 240-mile-long march across the villages of Gujarat. To mobilize the masses, Gandhi and other political leaders of the Indian National Congress made public speeches and launched mass petitions. Various means of public communication were employed, such as patriotic slogans and symbols, newspaper and journal articles from Gandhi’s own journals, international press articles, leaflets and pamphlets, lectures by INC activists while on-board a moving train to a “captive audience.” To foster the feeling of nationalism they pursued symbolic public acts such as displays of flags (tri-colour of India), public prayer and worship (Gandhi’s daily prayer meetings).

Gandhi continued his non-violent struggle till India’s freedom was achieved on 15 August 1947. The victory of Gandhi’s non-violent strategy influenced

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56 Mridula Mukherjee et. al. *India’s Struggle for Independence...*, p. 186.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid, p. 270.
prominent scholars and peace activists in India and abroad, including Gene Sharp, Nelson Mandela, and Martin Luther King. The Gandhian model of non-violent movement focused on people’s power of civil resistance, capable of breaking the hegemony of colonial rule. Gandhi’s model of non-violent political action emerged as a pioneering strategy of mass mobilization against unjust political systems. It has been exemplified by Martin Luther King Jr. in the Civil Rights Movement of the United States, the Apartheid Movement in South Africa, the “People’s Power” movement in the Philippines, and the non-violent struggle against communism in Eastern Europe. Gandhian principles of non-violence remain a source of inspiration for the millions still suffering under authoritarian rule. The case of the Singing Revolution in Lithuania is one more pioneering example of employing the non-violent means of political action inspired by Mahatma Gandhi.

Towards Gandhian Principles of Non-Violence

Two aspects help to better understand Gandhi’s influence on the ideas and strategies of non-violent struggle in Lithuania: common cultural and linguistic background of India and the Baltic States and the intellectual discourse on non-violence during the time of the Singing Revolution. Indian culture and philosophy have been popular among the Lithuanian cultural elite since the late 19th century. As noted by Lithuanian scholar and diplomat Diana Mickevičienė, “the 19th century was, by and large, the century of Indian influence in Lithuania, when recently discovered linguistic affinities impelled the thoughts of larger spiritual relations between our nations.” Similarly, in his lecture on the Lithuanian Singing Revolution, Prof. Vytis Čiubrinskas of the Centre for Oriental Studies at Vilnius University adds that “the ideology and strategies of India’s freedom struggle were carefully examined and discussed [a century later], while designing Lithuania’s own independence campaign during the last years of the Soviet Union.” There are many arguments and reasons to maintain that the Gandhian principles of non-violence played a major role in the proceedings of Lithuania’s Singing Revolution.

First, India and Lithuania share close cultural and linguistic ties. Ancient Indian Aryan Vedic religious traditions resemble in many aspects the practices of the

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59 Diana Mickevičienė, Relations Between Lithuania and India…. In 2011–14, Mickevičienė served as the Minister Counsellor of the Embassy the Republic of Lithuania in New Delhi, India.
60 Vytis Čiubrinskas, The Non-violent Singing Revolution of Lithuania, the lecture delivered at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 2012.
ancient Baltic pagan religion. The theory of “common origin” or common ancestral roots of the Balts and the Indians has been raised and discussed by many, including by such leading minds of linguistic research as S. K. Chatterji, recipient of Padma Bhushan in 1955. He wrote that:

“It may be mentioned in passing that during the 19th century, when the Baltic peoples, the Latvians and the Lithuanians, began to study their national literature (...) and became conscious of their Indo-European heritage, through their study of it from the German Sanskritists who took a leading part in establishing the ‘Aryan’ or Indo-Germanic or Indo-European bases of culture of the European peoples, they developed an uncritical and a rather emotional idea that the Baltic peoples came from the East – from Asia – and, as they thought, from India too.... The old Lithuanian priestesses, the Vaidilutės, used to tend the sacred fire as part of the old Indo-European Baltic religious rite, and this fire, as a modern Lithuanian poet suggested, ‘arrived in Lithuania from the banks of the Indus.’”

The Indo-European connections remain important to the modern Latvian and Lithuanian pagans. The myths of pre-Christian Latvian dainas and Lithuanian dainos, for example, have been compared with the Vedic hymns of ancient India. India’s religion, philosophy, culture, customs, myths and spirituality attracted Lithuanian philosophers and intellectuals. One of the prominent Indology scholars in Lithuania, a philosopher Vilhelmas Storostas Vydūnas (1868–1953), also known as the Lithuanian Gandhi, drew inspiration from the Hindu religious texts: “He was extremely interested in Indian philosophy, especially Hindu religious philosophy and spirituality, so that he could develop his own school of philosophy based on Vedanta.”

Prof. Audrius Beinorius of the Centre for Oriental Studies at Vilnius University, Lithuania, concluded that “the affinity of Vydūnas and the Hindu reformers is best seen through his and their relation with their own culture and the principles of using the culture in the struggle against national oppression.” Vydūnas’s philosophy was also constructed as an

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61 Suniti Kumar Chatterji, Balts and Aryans…. S. K. Chatterji was the first Indian scholar who in the 1960s systematically studied the Indo-European background of Balts and Aryans.

62 Ibid., quoted in: K. Bhaskaran Usha, The Evolving Relations between India and Baltic States…. p. 95. These hypothetical assumptions are subject to criticism. Acceptance and rejection of common ancestry theory exists among scholars.


64 K. Bhaskaran Usha, The Evolving Relations between India and Baltic States…. 

Influence of Gandhian Principles of Non-Violence in the Singing Revolution (Sąjūdis Movement) of Lithuania

instrument of uplifting the nation’s intellectual and spiritual capacities, of helping individuals to excel spiritually, to mature from inside and become immune to enslavement. Vydūnas started learning Sanskrit around 1910 and later translated the Bhagavad Gīta into Lithuanian, which was published in Germany in 1947. Prof. Beinorius clarifies further:

“When the philosophy of Vydūnas is taken as a whole (...), it is impossible to overlook its affinity to that school of Indian philosophy which included the ideas promoted by his contemporaries – the leaders of the Indian national movement and the reformers of India’s one of the strongest religions, Hinduism. The most outstanding among them were: R. Roy, R. Tagore, Sri Ramakrishna, S. Vivekananda, S. Dayananda, Sri Aurobindo, B. Tilak and M. K. Gandhi. The analogies between him and some distinguished Hindu reformers (particularly S. Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, M. K. Gandhi) and their concepts, problems and solutions, are truly outstanding.”

In the beginning of the 20th century, during the freedom struggle of India, the Indian leaders were keenly interested in and highly supportive of the independence struggle of the Baltic States. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, a freedom fighter and India’s first Prime Minister, expressed his views about the social-political developments in the Baltic States after World War I:

“They [Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland] are small states, but each is a distinct cultural entity with a separate language. You will be interested to know that the Lithuanians are Aryans (like many others in Europe) and their language bears quite a close resemblance of Sanskrit. This is a remarkable fact, which probably many people in India do not realize, and which brings home to us the bonds which unite distant people.”

Thus, although limited to a certain extent, the existence of the Baltic culture and its links with India were known to Indian national leaders. They truly cared about the freedom of the Baltic States, as an integral part of their overall concern about, and opposition to, any kind of subjugation and subordination in any part of the world.

66 Ibid.
Another link between India and Lithuania was established by famous Lithuanian traveller, explorer and anthropologist Antanas Poška (1903–1992), who set off, on a motorbike, from Vilnius to India in 1929. He arrived in Bombay in 1931 and spent almost 7 years in the country. During his stay he explored the linguistic and cultural links between India and Lithuania. He wrote a series of books “From the Baltic Sea to the Bay of Bengal,” in which he vividly described his experiences during the “Great Journey.”

Hermann Kallenbach, a Jewish architect of Lithuanian origin, serves as another link. Kallenbach was a very close friend of Mahatma Gandhi during his stay in South Africa. Gandhiji used to call him his “soulmate.” Kallenbach was associated with Satyagraha movement in South Africa. Sonja Schlesin, Gandhi’s private secretary in South Africa, was also a Jew of distant Lithuanian roots. There were many more Lithuanians who were directly or indirectly connected with India’s religious and cultural heritage, which reflected in their literary and artistic works. These connections stand as an ironclad proof that a long time before the Singing Revolution, Indian culture, religion, traditions and customs, even Gandhi’s non-violent methods and tactics, were already well-known to Lithuanian intellectuals, writers, artists, and various activist groups. On their part, Indian freedom fighters staunchly opposed the colonization of any nation and supported the independence of the Baltic States as they resurfaced on the world map in the wake of World War I.

India’s freedom struggle was a source of inspiration to many nations suffering under the colonial and authoritarian rule. Minitaitė notes that the very first resolution of the Supreme Council of the restored Lithuanian State stressed the importance of non-violent principles in the pursuit of its independence goals. In the words of Minitotaitė, those ideas were borrowed from abroad:

“The scale of the East European non-violent liberation movements can only be compared to India’s drive for independence, led by Mohandas Gandhi... Gandhi was among the first national leaders to show both in theory and in action that non-violent struggle is a positive force that can be successfully used in a conflict. He was convinced that non-violent action provided means of action incomparably superior to those of violence. Gandhi had noted that rulers and the ruled are ultimately bound...
by a relationship of partnership and mutual dependence rather than by one of force.... The proposition can be held as the axiom of the theory of non-violent action. This is of course not something entirely new. The idea was clearly stated by the 16th century writer Étienne de la Boetie, and later by Locke, Montesquieu and other classical representatives of political liberalism. Yet with Gandhi we see this axiom applied on a nearly unimaginable scale for national liberation [needs].”

The Gandhian model of Satyagraha against the British colonial rule was a factor that inspired Lithuanian masses to stick to non-violent means of resistance. Gandhian methods and strategies were followed meticulously throughout the entire liberation movement. Once established and consolidated, Gandhi became a dominant attraction point for the Baltic intellectual elite. K. B. Usha rightly observes that “the Baltic States had great respect for and genuine interest in Indian thought and ideas which had persuaded the Baltic people to partly borrow the philosophy of non-violence from Mahatma Gandhi.”

The religion, traditions and culture of Lithuania also contain values and norms of non-violence; at several points, they had already played their role in fighting foreign oppression. Vydūnas’s philosophy of humanism and love and kindness towards all human beings was deeply rooted in the hearts and minds of peace-loving Lithuanians. The philosophical underpinnings of Vydūnas and other Lithuanian intellectuals had established a deep sense and appreciation of spiritual resistance towards all kinds of wrongdoings. The mass awakening and the subsequent popular resistance at the end of the 19th – the beginning of the 20th century in Lithuania was a result of this culture and its symbolic expressions. The emergence of the Baltic States as independent states in 1918–20, was the result of this “soft power, skilfully converted to undermine foreign rule and promote self-rule.” Furthermore, non-violent elements rooted in their pagan religion and later reasserted by Christianity helped them to resist the national suppression. As noted by the experts, “a symbiosis of Catholicism and nationalism rendered Lithuania indigestible by its Russian masters and, for many Lithuanians, reinforced religious devotion there. Evolved from pagan into Christian motifs, the shrines arose in the period of ‘nations before nationalism’ – before the belief that every nation must have a state, but at a time when community consciousness helped form a solidarity against external threats.”

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70 Gražina Miniotaitė, Civil Disobedience: Justice against Legality..., p. 6.
71 K. Bhaskaran Usha, The Evolving Relations between India and Baltic States..., p. 95.
72 C. Walter Clemens Jr., Culture and Symbols as Tools of Resistance..., p. 170.
73 Ibid., p. 173.
Apart from the Indian national freedom movement, another major factor which encouraged the founding fathers of Independent Lithuania to adopt the non-violent means of political struggle was its success in bringing down the totalitarian regimes elsewhere in Eastern Europe, America, South Africa and so on. Gandhi’s teachings had influenced many prominent scholars and peace activists in India and abroad, such as Gene Sharp, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, etc. The Gandhian model of non-violent political action had emerged as a pioneering strategy to mobilize the masses against the unjust political systems. The unarmed people in Eastern Europe followed suit. In Czechoslovakia, the Velvet Revolution led by Vaclav Havel mobilized lakhs of people demanding their freedom: “Havel called their quest for freedom ‘a living in truth’ as distinct from the lies and deception under which they had lived.”74 Before that, Gandhian principles had been tested by the Afro-American Civil Rights Movement led by Martin Luther King Jr. He explored the techniques of non-violent action and employed them in his pursuit of social and political emancipation of the Blacks. In 1963, M. L. King organized peaceful marches and demonstrations in Alabama for the improvement of socio-economic conditions and civil rights of the African Americans. According to him, “non-violence is a powerful demand for reason and justice. If it is rudely rebuked, it is not transformed into resignation and passivity. Southern segregationists in many places yielded to it because they realized that the alternatives could be intolerable.”75 The long journey of the civil rights movement in America succeed in 1968 when the US Congress enacted the Civil Rights Act providing African Americans and other minority communities equal access to public facilities and prohibited discrimination in jobs on racial grounds. Thus, “the Gandhian and Kingian movements became a seedbed for social ferment and revolutionary change across the planet, providing a mighty impetus for social transformation.”76

Finally, the ultimate reason for adopting the non-violent means to restore national sovereignty was the necessity of avoiding direct confrontation with Soviet troops, which could have led to bloodshed and large-scale socio-economic devastation. The Lithuanian people had bitter experience of violent guerrilla warfare in the early period of their occupation by the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union had brutally suppressed this resistance, leaving tens of thousands of Lithuanian citizens dead and hundreds of thousands repressed and persecuted. This histori-

74 Richard Deats, Active Non-Violence across the World..., p. 9.
75 Martin Luther King Jr. “Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?”, 1968, quoted in: Adam Roberts & Timothy Garton Ash (eds.), Civil Resistance and Power Politics....
cal experience, combined with the memories of mass deportations and the Holocaust, played an important role. The Lithuanian people realized that it was better not to take that path again. As the threat of military intervention increased, so did the popular understanding that the only way of countering the aggression was “Gandhi’s way.”

Robert L. Helvey has noted that by strategic calculation "the non-violent struggle is advanced as an alternative to armed conflict, in part, because of the reasonable likelihood that it will result in fewer lives lost and less destruction of property." The Baltic people found Gandhian means more practical, especially after Gorbachev’s policies of Glasnost and Perestroika had provided them with sufficient space and an opportunity to deploy non-violent methods.

### Manifestation of Gandhian Principles in the Singing Revolution

The manifestation of Gandhian principles of non-violence can be seen in the mass mobilization of the Lithuanian people by Sąjūdis and its persistent, dedicated and active non-violent actions. In any non-violent struggle, the strategies and methods might be different according to the situation, but basic elements of non-violence remain same. At the same time, Lithuania’s Singing Revolution was a path-breaking journey as it generated new and different tactics and methods, such as the use of songs to inspire millions of people to fight their cause. Since its inception in 1988, Sąjūdis emerged as a political entity that started challenging the power monopoly of the Communist Party in Lithuania. It tried to build a consensus among the Lithuanian people about the socio-political issues; environmental pollution became the first priority that created a phenomenon called “eco-nationalism.”

It also called for the full restoration of the Baltic States’ independence, i.e. return to the status quo as it existed prior to the notorious 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

The leaders of Sąjūdis formulated their strategy and tactics based on non-violent methods. Minotaitė during her personal interview with an Indian scholar said that “Gandhian ideas were known in Lithuania. When people chose non-violence as their strategy, India’s freedom movement and the Gandhian experience emerged an important theme for discussion, among other things.”

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77 Gražina Miniotaitė, *Civil Disobedience: Justice against Legality*, p. 204.
78 Robert L. Helvey, *On Strategic Non-violent Conflict*, p. 11.
80 Jane Dawson, *Eco-Nationalism*, p. 5.
81 Gražina Miniotaitė, a prominent scholar and active participant of the Singing Revolution, expressed her observations in a personal interview with Dr. K. Bhaskaran Usha, Assistant Professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Dr. Usha has developed the Baltic studies programme within the Centre for Russian and Central Asian Studies.
personally discovered Gandhian ideas through Gene Sharp’s writings about civil defence. Sharp’s writings had been published in the Baltic States to teach the locals how to start non-violent resistance.\textsuperscript{82} Eventually, \textit{Sąjūdis} evolved into a mass organization; participation was open to all, including Communist Party members as well as dissidents and political prisoners of the Soviet regime. \textit{Sąjūdis} welcomed people from all backgrounds – political, social, and cultural. Its main strategies were: civilian resistance, civil disobedience, public protests and mass demonstrations, socio-political boycott, singing songs and organizing songs festivals at a mass level, town hall meetings and open discussions, demonstration of the prohibited national symbols such as the Lithuanian yellow-green-red tricolour, tearing down of the Soviet flags; celebrating banned holidays and festivals, distribution of leaflets, non-compliance with oppressive laws, and training activists to engage in and sustain non-violent actions. \textit{Sąjūdis} also published and distributed the success stories of other non-violent revolutions. Thus, the stories of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. were translated into Lithuanian language and distributed to all members: “They derived from a pattern of thought and action that spun from Henry David Thoreau to Lev Tolstoy to Gandhi to Martin Luther King.”\textsuperscript{83}

The festivals of song and dance emerged as a powerful binding force that energized the peaceful masses; it worked as a platform of public communication to enhance the ideas of non-violence. In July 1988, the nation-wide tour of rock music performances led by architect and musician Algirdas Kaušpėdas, a member of the national council of \textit{Sąjūdis}, was organized.\textsuperscript{84} The songs turned out to be a weapon and a shield; “the masses of peaceful people were armed with songs.”\textsuperscript{85} In danger and in celebration, they would sing to demonstrate their unbreakable spirit. Furthermore, they would sing in particular the songs forbidden by the Soviet authorities, just to show their defiance with the oppressive regime.\textsuperscript{86}

The music and songs exerted a strong influence over the minds of the Lithuanian people and helped to consolidate national feeling.

On Christmas Eve of 1988, a celebration still officially banned by the Soviet authorities, people were asked to turn off their lights for half an hour and place candles in their windows “as a symbolic vote for Lithuanian independence.”\textsuperscript{87}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{82} Janis Chakars, \textit{The Singing Revolution}..., p. 9. 
\textsuperscript{83} C. Walter Clemens Jr., \textit{Culture and Symbols as Tools of Resistance}..., p. 170. 
\textsuperscript{84} Non-Violent Database: \textit{Lithuanian Campaign for Independence 1987–1991}.... 
\textsuperscript{85} Guntis Smidchens, \textit{The Power of Song}..., p. 313. 
\textsuperscript{86} Romas V estokas, \textit{Singing Revolution in Lithuania}.... 
\textsuperscript{87} Gražina Miniotaitė, \textit{Non-Violent Resistance in Lithuania}..., p. 38.}
Lithuanian people also applied the methods of boycott and non-cooperation. For example, in 1989–90, Lithuanian boys eligible for military service in the Soviet army boycotted conscription by destroying their conscription tickets and absconding. The schools and hospitals helped them in every way possible by delaying the transfer of graduation lists to the Soviet authorities and providing shelter for the runaways. There were other expressions of protest too, which made a huge difference. Thus, “over one hundred veterans of the Soviet army [publicly] returned their medals and awards. A number of public organizations, including the Lithuanian Communist Party itself, formally and effectively terminated their relationship with [the parent institutions in] Moscow.”\(^{88}\) These examples of non-cooperation bear a clear resemblance to the Gandhian methods applied during the freedom struggle of India.

Another significant event during the Singing Revolution, which firmly upholds the Gandhian values of non-violence, was the “Baltic Chain.” On the 50\(^{th}\) anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact in August 1989, about 2 million people joined their hands to form a 650-kilometre-long human chain connecting the capitals of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.\(^{89}\) The pictures of this unprecedented act of solidarity went viral and left no man or woman indifferent, both at home and abroad. While holding each other’s hands, Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians were singing patriotic songs thus further disarming the Soviet propaganda claims about the potentially violent nature of the Baltic independence movement. This singing of patriotic songs reminds us of the Gandhian method of collective prayer that he used to boost the morale and vigour of Satyagrahis.

The Baltic leaders found public media to be an easy and effective way of propagating and disseminating the Gandhian principles of non-violence among the Baltic masses. Mass media emerged as a key source of knowledge and the main platform of public debate. To increase the awareness of non-violent means among the Baltic people, “Richard Attenborough’s ‘The Gandhi’ was repeatedly shown on national television.”\(^{90}\) The epic movie, which covers Gandhi’s life and his non-violent struggle (from South African times to Indian independence), left a deep psychological imprint on the minds of the Baltic people. In addition, “popular local newspapers, such as Gimtasis kraštas, Soglasīye, and Lietuvos aidas, regularly published articles on the history and techniques of civilian resistance. Several television programs explained

\(^{88}\) Non-Violent Database: Lithuanian Campaign for Independence 1987–1991....

\(^{89}\) Ibid.

\(^{90}\) Richard Deats, Active Non-Violence across the World...., p. 9.
the basic principles of civilian defence.”91 The Baltic mass media turned out to be a vital and integral member of the Singing Revolution. It also played a significant role in raising the Baltic people’s awareness about the crimes and atrocities of the Communist regime.92

Very similarly, during the freedom struggle of India, Mahatma Gandhi had also utilised the medium of mass communication. Interpersonal media, folk art media and mass media were used to reach out to the public. This came to be known as “Gandhian techniques of communication.”93 He published and edited a number of newspapers and journals to heighten the understanding of non-violent methods, but he also used them to criticize the British government’s policies. In “Young India” of 2 July 1925, he wrote: “I have taken up journalism, not for its sake, but merely as an aid to what I have conceived to be my mission in life. My mission is to teach by example and present under severe restraint in the use of the matchless weapon of Satyagraha, which is a direct corollary of nonviolence.” These techniques of non-violent struggle employed by Gandhi received widespread press coverage at home and internationally.

The Lithuanian Supreme Council declared independence on 11 March 1990. The Soviet leadership predictably denounced this act as “unconstitutional.” Moscow sought to bring Lithuania to her knees by imposing a full-scale economic blockade in April 1990.94 The effectiveness of non-violent struggle proved itself most vividly during the tragic events in January 1991. On 8 January 1991, the Soviet Union tried to impose a coup d'état in Lithuania and change the rebellious Lithuanian leadership. The leader of Sąjūdis Professor Vytautas Landsbergis went on the airwaves calling on the people to defend their legitimate government: “Come and help your own government, otherwise it would be replaced by a foreign one.”95 Tens of thousands of people from across Lithuania rushed to the capital to protect the Parliament and other strategic sites. They would stand day and night, in the cold winter weather, singing and praying and offering their unarmed bodies as a living shield against Soviet tanks. On the night of 13 January 1991, 14 people were actually crushed by the tanks or shot dead by the advancing Soviet troops in the vicinity of the TV tower in Vilnius. All broadcasts were stopped but

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91 Gražina Miniotaitė, Lithuania: From Non-Violent Liberation to Non-violent Defence..., p. 207.
93 Narasimha Reddi, Effective Public Relations and Media Strategy..., p. 474.
within a few minutes, they resumed from the alternative tower in Kaunas. As people refused to disperse, even after the news broke about the killings by Soviet soldiers, the latter were forced to withdraw from the Parliament building fearing more bloodshed and mass condemnation.

This day is remembered as ‘bloody Sunday’ in the history of modern Lithuania. It revealed to the world the real face of the Soviet Union. Despite the real threat, the Sąjūdis leaders remained firm about their strategy of non-violent response. Instead of surrendering or issuing a call to arms, they called on the citizens to “hold to principles of nonviolent resistance and political and social non-cooperation.” On 28 February 1990, the Supreme Council even adopted a formal resolution that reads in part: “In the event a regime of active occupation is introduced, citizens of the Republic of Lithuania are asked to adhere to principles of disobedience, nonviolent resistance, and political and social non-cooperation as the primary means of struggle for independence.” In August 1991, after a failed coup in Moscow, Lithuania’s sovereignty was fully restored and was officially recognized by the international community.

The victory of the Singing Revolution was also a victory of the Gandhian principles of non-violence. Civil resistance, civilian-based defence, social and political boycotting and non-cooperation with an aggressor – all proved effective. It was the victory of the singing people who firmly held to the ideals of non-violent action. In hindsight, it is clear that the Gandhian philosophy was chosen by the Baltic people as their weapon in opposing Soviet rule. The active role of the local media made this task easier. The Singing Revolution repeated the success of India’s non-violent struggle, just in a different historical time and geopolitical context.

Bibliography


96 Gražina Miniotaitė, Non-Violent Resistance in Lithuania....
97 Gražina Miniotaitė, Non-Violent Resistance in Lithuania..., p. 56.


Influence of Gandhian Principles of Non-Violence in the Singing Revolution (Sąjūdis Movement) of Lithuania


Gandhism: Similarities between Lithuanian and Indian Independence Movements

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In this paper, I will discuss the non-violent means of achieving independence and their role in the independence movements of India and Lithuania. In both cases, the central figure is Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who brought this ideal to the masses and served as a role model not only for Indians, but also for Lithuanians and many other people. I will approach the issue from the viewpoint of political philosophy, and by analyzing some historiographical facts will try to substantiate a more critical opinion on the role that the non-violent doctrine has purportedly played in the above-mentioned nations. The main question is: does the principle of non-violent passive resistance work in all circumstances, and if doesn’t, why? In this endeavor, I will compare different standpoints of Gandhi and another philosopher and freedom fighter, Aurobindo Ghose, also known as Sri Aurobindo.

Keywords: politics, nonviolent resistance, communalism, Hinduism, independence

Intersection of Religious and Political Thinking

Let us start from the tentative assumption that Gandhi’s politics was based on his religious upbringing and intense piety, or devotion. His spiritual image and idealism is the reason why philosophers, scholars and people at large regard him as a great person, the Mahatma, who consistently followed his creed and sought to methodically define it in his social and political work. This is indeed

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an idiosyncratic feature of his character. However, the aura of spirituality also serves to mask the existing incongruence between Gandhi’s words and deeds, a discrepancy which in no way undermines Gandhi’s great accomplishments but still allows political and religious scholars to scrutinize him as their object of study.

The idea of abhimsa, a non-violent mode of existence, Gandhi borrowed from Jainism. Though far from being orthodox, he considered himself a Hindu. He linked the greatness of Hinduism with its tolerant and non-violent nature. Passive resistance, he used to say, is a power of the soul, unparalleled and overcoming the power of arms. Thanks to Gandhi religious ideas have moved to and got rooted in the social and political domain. However, his rigid compliance with religious truths, and especially with the idea that everyone, despite their religious views and the complex reality of the time, will sooner or later give in to the power of abhimsa, eventually backfired. True, Gandhi’s moral authority had allowed him, at times, to conciliate the conflicting forces – we find enough successful examples of his personal role in stopping violence. But at the crucial junctures – be it World War II atrocities, Hindu-Muslim relations, or the partition of India – his standpoints only underscored the fundamental mismatch between one’s individual virtues and the larger political aspirations of a nation.

Dalton claims that Gandhi learned much from his predecessors: “The marriage of politics and religion had been indicated by Aurobindo; it was consummated in the thought of Gandhi. He, like Aurobindo, blessed the union with sacred symbols and beliefs.” It was Sri Aurobindo who coined a political program, wherein non-cooperation movement and passive resistance were integral parts. Sri Aurobindo’s “Doctrine of Passive Resistance” had been completed two years before Gandhi finished his “Hind Swaraj”; however, Aurobindo quit the political scene soon after being released from the Alipore jail in 1914, whereas Gandhi at that time had just returned from South Africa and joined the political campaign. In this regard, Gandhi was a capable student. Yet, a mere imitator he was not. Gandhi in his teachings managed to escape reference to the powerful, frightening and militant image of Mother Kali – a traditional symbol that Aurobindo and other social reformers readily used in their struggle against British rule. Gandhi also transformed the military character of a Hindu kshatrya. In his comments on the Bhagavad Gita, he wrote: “The

1 Peter Heehs, Nationalism..., p.271.
2 Mohandas K. Gandhi, Hind Swaraj..., p. 57.
Gīta is not a description of battle; neither is it a justification of violence (...) its teaching as a whole has even less to do with the advocacy of violence”. 4 Gandhi was convinced that true dharma is non-violence, and violence is for the unawakened. To Aurobindo such an explanation was one-sided. 5 In his “Essays on the Gīta” Aurobindo explains the ideal of dharma yuddha and reconstructs the ancient ideal of a warrior, kshatrya. 6 These ideas were alien to Gandhi. Some scholars allege that Gandhi’s concept of abimsa and satyagraha is more Christian than Hindu. 7 According to Neufeldt, Hindutva emerged as a reaction to Gandhism, which allegedly supported the “anti-Indian” demands of Muslims. 8

Ahimsa and Gandhi’s Politics during World War II

Let us see how the moral and religious aspects of abimsa and satyagraha worked in the real world. During World War II, Gandhi’s Quit India movement and his refusal to assist the Allies had paralyzed the Congress and effectively deprived him of the reins of the resistance struggle. From today’s moral point of view, it is also noteworthy that Gandhi did not think of Hitler as a bad person; neither did he see a difference between the Nazis and the Allied Forces. 9 His proposal to the British people to give up their colonies to Hitler, should he occupy these territories, 10 today sounds absolutely inadequate. Gandhi couldn’t realize that Nazi Germany was a much greater danger than British rule at that time. Sri Aurobindo, on the contrary, sided with the Allies by personally investing in war bonds and, particularly, by advocating Sir Stafford Cripps’ Proposals across the Congress’s membership. He maintained that dominion status, if granted by Britain, would bring India one step closer towards full independence and thus, should be accepted unconditionally. In his urgent appeal to the Congress Working Committee, Sri Aurobindo argued:

“I – Japan’s imperialism being young and based on industrial and military power and moving westward, is a greater menace to India than the British imperialism which is old, which the country has learnt to deal with and which is on its way to extinction; 2 – It would be better to get into the saddle without being particular about the legal basis of the power; but once the power lands in our hands and we

5 Sri Aurobindo, Essays on the Gita..., pp. 44–51.
6 Ibid.
7 Timothy Gorringe, Gandhi and the Christian Community..., p. 153.
8 Ronald Neufeldt, The Hindu Mahasabha and Gandhi..., p. 139.
occupy all the seats [of power], we will be able to establish ourselves and reassert our positions; 3 – The proposed Cabinet would provide opportunities for the Congress and the Muslims to understand each other and pull [themselves] closer together for the country’s good, especially at the time of crisis; 4 – With the Hindu Mahasabha also being represented, the Hindus will have a chance of proving their capacity to govern India for the benefit of not only the Hindus but also of the whole nation; 5 – The main problem remains to organize India in ways that would help to repel the threat of aggression.”

Unfortunately, both the Congress and the British found the Cripps’ Proposals unacceptable. The partition of India ensued, bringing about confusion, calamity, and bloodshed. As Ramachandra Guha points out, the number of victims caused by mass relocations following the Partition amount to two millions. One of the founding fathers of Independent Pakistan, Chaudhary Khaliquzzaman, concluded that “the partition of India [had] proven injurious to the Muslims of India, and on a long-term basis, for Muslims everywhere.” This also marks a failure of Gandhi’s idealistic expectations, because neither the Congress, nor Muhammad Ali Jinnah, leader of All-India Muslim League, subscribed to his proposal to elect Jinnah as the first president of Independent India. Satyagraha in fact didn’t help to curb communalism. On the contrary, concessions to the demands of communalists were only escalating mutual antagonism and finally produced a catastrophe on a national scale.

Sri Aurobindo maintained that the theory of “two nations” was just a propaganda cliché and that Gandhi’s idea about a nation, consisting of equal communities peacefully coexisting together, had no sound basis at all. Julius Lipner showed that the Indian Muslims could not accept Gandhi’s idea of ahimsa, especially during the war. Thus, a Muslim scholar, Abul Kalam Azad, just like Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhai Patel and other leaders of the independence movement, was rather keen to support the British Crown in exchange for its granting full independence to India. A Muslim leader, Mohamed Ali, even pronounced that war, though being a great evil, cannot frighten the true followers of the Prophet and must be fought with all means available.

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11 Nirodbaran, *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo…*, p. 149.
13 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
can also mention the views of Subhas Chandra Bose, his ultimatums to the British Raj, and the actions of the Indian National Army. It seems that during World War II, Gandhi, with his pacifist ideals of *ahimsa*, could hardly find supporters at either end of the political spectrum.

In conclusion, we would argue that the partition of India was a result of factors larger than the mere “divide and rule” policies pursued by the Brits. To a certain extent, the latter arguably showed a better understanding of real politics and the power of compromise than the local leaders of India. Gandhi with his influence over the Congress certainly played a significant role.

**Gandhi’s Idea of Non-Violence and Its Reception in Lithuania**

Let us now discuss the similarities between India and Lithuania in their approaches towards non-violence. Gandhi was and still is the most popular and best known Indian name in Lithuania. His impact on Lithuanian independence movement was considerable. Some would argue that Gandhi’s ideas blended seamlessly with the naturally benign and peaceful character of Lithuanians. Thus, a Lithuanian author Vacys Bagdonavičius compares Gandhi with a prominent figure of the early 20th century Lithuanian national independence movement, Vydynas.\(^{17}\) He finds some parallels between the reformers of Hinduism and certain groups of Lithuanian nationalists like *aušrininkai* or *romuviečiai*. He also underlines the importance of the ethical imperative shared by both Gandhi and Vydynas. However, unlike Gandhi, Vydynas followed a more pragmatic approach as to the means and methods of achieving independence: “Vydynas was a *Gandhian* in terms of his genuine commitment to non-violence and full rejection of the use of force. But his thought in this respect was not always fully consistent. Perhaps, under the impact of the *Bhagavad Gita*, he sometimes not only stressed the weight of human moral duties, but also acknowledged violence if it was necessary to fulfill these duties.”\(^{18}\) In this respect, Vydynas was closer to such political thinkers as Sri Aurobindo and others.

One more remark by Bagdonavičius deserves our attention: “Lithuania’s [predominantly] peaceful way towards independence in 1918 was to a large extent modelled along the lines drawn by Vydynas. On this path, Lithuania moved faster and was more successful than India; this was the subject of ad-

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\(^{17}\) Vacys Bagdonavičius, *Spindulys esmi begalinės šviesos...*, p. 20.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., p. 41.
miration for Gandhi himself.” Bagdonavičius also claims that absence of national unity and consensus in Independent India came as a great shock to Gandhi. In a more extensive study “Response to Gandhism in Lithuania,” published in 1997, Bagdonavičius reviews the periods of Lithuanian history, when Gandhism was of critical importance to the national non-violent resistance movement, including that of Soviet occupation. Generally, Bagdonavičius sticks to the classical interpretation of non-violence and fails to examine it critically. This feature is peculiar to the majority of Lithuanian authors on Gandhi.

The Role of Non-Violence in Lithuanian Independence Movement of the Late 20th Century

Academic research of Gandhi’s idea of non-violence and its application in Lithuania also received prominence in the writings of Lithuanian philosopher Gražina Miniotaitė, who in 1991–95 also served as a leader of the social organization, Centre for Non-Violent Action.

In 1995, participants of the international conference, “Non-Violence and Tolerance in Changing Central and Eastern Europe,” scrutinized non-violence from the angle of tolerance. Some authors linked non-violence with the concepts of Lithuanian nationalism, Lithuanian ethnic culture, traditional education or the prevalent “green” ethics based on ecology. Thus, Jonas Bikulčius described Gandhi’s philosophy of non-violence as “a non-violence of the strong against the impotence of the weak.” In his opinion, non-violence is an option for Lithuanians to preserve the nation’s vitality, self-consciousness and ultimate survival.

Miniotaitė, who studied Gandhi from the perspective of Western liberal thought, has linked the idea of civil disobedience with the school of antique philosophy. It may be Gandhi who has given peaceful resistance a larger public profile, but he in no way has monopoly over it: “During the 20th century, civil disobedience (...) was used in almost all fights against oppression, including those struggling for national independence and human rights.” In India, too, the idea of peaceful resistance was known already before Gandhi.

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19 Vacy Bagdonavičius, Sugrįžti prie Vydūno..., p. 55.
20 Ibid., p. 289.
21 Ibid., p. 295.
22 The list of the participants included such renowned Lithuanian scholars as: Krescencijus Stoškus, Algirdas Degutis, Vaclovas Bagdonavičius, Evaldas Nekrašas, Kęstutis Šerpetis, and others.
24 Gražina Miniotaitė, Pilietinis nepaklusnumas: teorija ir praktika..., p. 75.
Many thinkers were fascinated and inspired by the Irish Home Rule movement. Aurobindo’s political program was largely based on the principles of Home Rule, but he also borrowed ideas from the history of freedom struggle in France, Italy, and the United States. Mazzini and Joan of Arc were his heroes. In Lithuania, civil disobedience was important yet supplementary to other forms of national struggle during its independence campaign. As Miniotaitė puts it, “the role of civilian-based defense in the defense system of Lithuania should not be overestimated. Even though it proved its efficiency in 1990–91, it has not become an alternative to military defense, but is its important supplement.”

Lithuania’s successful efforts to restore independence in 1918 and again in 1990 are recognized globally as inspiring examples of non-violent struggle. In the process of dismantling the Soviet Union and its satellite communist bloc, “Lithuania was a notable exception.” However, this viewpoint is not error-proof. Lithuania’s peaceful campaign contains a few elements of direct military confrontation. For example, armed conflict between Lithuanian and Polish troops over Vilnius in the early 20th century; military takeover of the Klaipėda Region in 1923, active underground resistance during the Soviet and the Nazi occupations. Even the Singing Revolution of the eighties and the nineties was not entirely non-violent. One of the founders of the Voluntary National Defense Service, officer Antanas Burokas remembers: “On 8th of January [1991] we were well-prepared. We unleashed water cannons against the attacking crowd of [pro-Soviet] Jedinstvo [supporters] and together with thousands of Lithuanians succeeded in defending the Parliament. The provocation failed.”

Clearly, non-violence is not and cannot be absolute, and clinging to it regardless of the actual circumstances may lead to a disaster. At the same time, Burokas provides another example of the policy followed by the Lithuanian Government during the critical months prior to its full recognition by the Soviet Union: “At that time we used to repeat: ‘We won’t fight! We follow Gandhi! We are peaceful people!’ (…). But when Lithuania didn’t have its own army, what would they [Soviets] do to us on the border? (…) They would violate the border, abuse, harass, and kill our [customs] officers.

25 Gražina Miniotaitė, Elements of Civilian-Based Defense..., p. 147.
27 Jedinstvo (Unity) was a pro-Soviet political organization led by Valery Ivanov, which opposed the restoration of Lithuanian independence and was directly linked with the authorities in Moscow. On 8th of January 1991 Jedinstvo attempted a coup d’état under the pretext of “mass frustration” against surging prices, which were deregulated, first time after the 50 years of command economy, on the same day.
28 Daiva Tamošaitytė, Antanas Burokas: Netenkina pokyčiai, vykstantys šiuos dvidešimt metų...
We would nevertheless follow the order to refrain from responding and just keep doing our job, that’s all.”

A view prevails among present-day Lithuanian philosophers, political theorists and decision-makers that there can be neither absolute non-violence nor absolute tolerance, and that real circumstances must always be taken into account. Through the study of how the laws of nature apply to human psychology, a researcher, Rimantas Kalinauskas, has come to a conclusion that the most unstable form of relationship is neutrality, as it can easily transform into either rapport or conflict; circumstances will always push the neutral person to take one or another position.

The downside of a non-violent approach is most prominent in the conditions of war, when nations face the risk of extinction. World War II has taught India and Lithuania a good lesson. It was already mentioned that the Gandhian approach in India during these years was supplemented by the military activities of the INA and the revolutionaries. In Lithuania, the policy of neutrality and non-resistance, despite having a strong National Army, resulted in foreign occupation in 1940, but was later corrected by the active resistance policy of the short-lived Juozas Ambrasevičius-Brazaitis’s Provisional Government (June–August 1941) and a long guerilla war of 1945–53. Vytautas Mankevičius argues that all crucial moments in Lithuania’s history are marked by non-violent resistance going hand in hand with armed struggle; many of the non-violent methods were successfully incorporated into the overall structure of active resistance.

Some people tend to overestimate the power of non-violent approach by ignoring the fact that it can succeed only under favorable historical conditions. In fact, it is regime weakness rather than the power of non-violence which triggers and upholds the shift in the political equilibrium and allows negotiations to proceed in a peaceful manner. Both the British Empire and the Soviet Union shared this destiny. Of course, the talent to identify these favorable conditions and seize them for pursuing national goals peacefully must be duly appreciated, especially given the fact that historically, such conditions emerge very rarely. One of the darkest moments in the doctrine of non-violence is its failure to address the tragedy of the Holocaust: the massive acquiescence of millions of European Jews to the murderous Nazi orders neither saved them from annihilation nor stopped the atrocities. Hence, the question: what was the point?

29 Ibid.
30 Rimantas Kalinauskas, Santykiai tarp subjekty..., p.105.
Conclusions

Gandhi’s idea of non-violent resistance played an important role in achieving Indian independence before and after World War II. *Ahimsa* and *satyagraha* united the Indian people under one flag. Yet, it failed to bring on board Jinnah’s All-India Muslim League, which chose to stay aside and struggle for its longtime claim to form an independent Muslim state. Gandhi’s idealistic policies proved impractical to solve the seething problem of communalism; they were also instrumental in turning down the Cripps’ Proposals, which only brought the prospect of Partition closer. The horrors of World War II have reasserted the opinion that non-violent resistance can only be successful if supported and accompanied by the act of force.

Gandhi’s *ahimsa* was criticized already by his contemporaries, such as Sri Aurobindo Ghose, who considered *ahimsa* inapplicable to the whole nation and urged Indians to help the Allies in their war efforts. He also backed the Cripps’ Proposals, which he saw as a perfect remedy for solving many problems at once: the Muslim issue, the Partition issue, the issue of Independence (which could be achieved via gradual transition from a dominion to full independence). Also, it has been noted that Gandhi’s religious views largely ignored the traditional Hindu concept of *Kshatriya*. His interpretation of the *Bhagavad Gita* in this sense was incomplete and challenged by revolutionaries like Subhas Chandra Bose, who exploited the image of a furious Kali – a deity that must be protected by *Kshatriyas* – to explain and promote his own concept of Mother India.

Throughout different historical periods of Lithuania’s struggle for independence we find many parallels to substantiate this criticism. Like India’s, Lithuania’s freedom struggle was notably non-violent; but like in India, some elements of use of force were also present. Lithuanian authors still prefer to overlook these elements and promote a rather non-critical romantic viewpoint based on Gandhiism. A more critical approach would definitely help Indians and Lithuanians better understand the complexities of their modern history.

Bibliography:


See also: IdealIndia.com.


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