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Systems Thinking: The Gandhian Way*

LAKSHMAIAH BOTLA

The article discusses the parallels in systems thinking and Gandhian thinking. Aristotle’s principle that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts is interpreted from multiple perspectives. The whole and the part and their relationships are discussed to understand various wholes in the organization. The Gandhian orientation of whole and his leadership style in the light of various systems thinkers are evaluated. The article concentrates on the application of systems thinking to the Indian Freedom Movement to excavate the Gandhian foresight while leading the people in India. The article endeavours to project Mahatma Gandhi as a modern systems thinker in India.

Introduction

Paulo Coelho’s The Alchemist discusses the world’s greatest lie that says, ‘at a certain point in our lives, we lose control of what’s happening to us, and our lives become controlled by fate. That is the world’s greatest lie’ (Coelho 2004: 18). The people who are working in an organization many a times think that it is their fate to be in that organization. The employees in the organization are not able to make choices because they lack enough freedom in the organization. Customer service, strategic planning, targets, hierarchy, competition and so on, suffocates everyone in the organization that they forget having a life of their own. Is it fate or destiny not to have the freedom in the organization? The Fifth Discipline of Peter M. Senge, also called as systems thinking (Senge 2006: 11), has discussed three levels of thinking: generative, responsive and reactive (ibid.: 52). Peter M. Senge says ‘generative learning cannot be sustained in an organization where event

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thinking predominates’ (Senge 2006: 53). Fate and destiny are basically event oriented and are reactive in nature hence; one should go deeper than events to understand the structural explanations so that generative thinking can alter the fate through which one can design his desired future.

Background

Traditionally managers have learned to manage an organization by orchestrating its various functions, namely, marketing, finance, production, personnel and so on, separately that resulted in sub-optimization; parts achieve their goals at the expense of the whole. The traditional belief of managers has forced them to see the organizational world in parts. It is assumed that looking at the parts gives them the means to manage the whole. This thinking has led managers into chaos. Managers have then started looking for answers. They need a different level of thinking. As rightly put by Albert Einstein, ‘the problems of today will not be solved by the same thinking that produced the problem in the first place’. The answer or the different level of thinking is found in systems thinking. Now the fundamental question is what is systems thinking?

Before defining ‘systems thinking’, first we define ‘system’. Webster defines ‘system’ as, ‘a set of arrangement of things so related or connected as to form a unity or organized whole.’ Very simply, a system is a collection of parts (or subsystems) integrated to accomplish an overall goal. It is a whole consisting of parts of elements which have some characteristic relationship with one another and which, equally important, interact with one another.

Systems thinking is about the relationship between the whole and the part. Peter M. Senge defines, ‘systems thinking is a discipline for seeing wholes. It is a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things, for seeing patterns of change rather than static snapshots’ (ibid).

Systems Thinking of an organization starts from the outside-in. How does this organization look to its customers? With the introduction of systems thinking in the organization, the traditional thinking of functional orientation like, financial management, marketing management, human resource management, and so on, has transformed into strategic financial management, strategic marketing management, strategic human resource management, and so on. Organizations have started thinking from wholes and from strategic perspectives. This shift in thought has transformed organizations into higher levels. The thinking has shifted from the part to the whole to the whole to the part. Organizations have started everything from the perspective of customer, the ultimate whole. Customer is king or customer is god, and so on, is the phrase that has become a success mantra in the organization. The customer perspective has started dominating everywhere and even the value chain of Michael Porter has got reversed where the value is added not from the left to the right but value is subtracted from the right to the left because value is created first at the customer level.

Herb Kelleher, CEO of Southwest Airlines says that, ‘we don’t have a marketing department; we have a Customer Department. And we don’t have a personnel department; we have a People Department’ (Kotler 1999: 165). Another CEO says, ‘The sales department isn’t the whole company, but the whole company better be the sales department’. Peter F. Drucker says that marketing makes sales superfluous. The paradigm of this thinking is based on Aristotle’s principle, ‘the whole is more than the sum of the parts’. Since organizations are social systems, according to Aristotle’s principle, the social whole must be
greater than the sum of individual beings in the organization. The social whole has a purpose by itself, either to serve customers, or maximization of shareholder value, or market leadership and so on. The purpose of the whole can be made consciously and it has enough freedom to pursue its purpose. But what about the purpose of the part, does it have any freedom? Does the principle of Aristotle provide any freedom to the part? This is the fundamental question in the organization today. The freedom or the purpose or the choice of the part is the crucial question to be answered now. This problem is coming from yesterday’s conceptualization of Aristotle’s principle in the organization as the whole is more than the sum of the parts.

**Relationship between the Whole and the Part**

Biologist Humberto Mathurana says, ‘If social systems are autopoietic, I don’t want to live in them. Because in autopoietic systems the part is totally determined by the whole in order to reproduce certain function of the larger system. It’s like Orwell’s 1984. It’s the end of freedom and choice in social systems’ (Scharmer 1999b: 14). The global interview project1 with 25 eminent thinkers on knowledge and leadership has brought out many insights about the nature of relationship between individual human beings and the larger organizational whole.

Claus Otto Scharmer’s2 interviews with science philosopher Henry Bortofo and Japanese philosopher Ryoske Ohashi have opened new understandings between part and whole. He says that there seems to be two different notions of the whole-part relationship in social systems. The first one is what Mathurana calls ‘Orwell’s 1984 version of society’: the part (individuum) is determined by the whole. The second notion is closer to what Ohashi and Bortofo suggested in their interviews: that the individuum is not determined by the whole but rather conceived of as a place in which an emerging new whole can come into being (ibid.: 14). He again says, ‘the first whole, I would like to call the traditional (and often oppressive whole) of social systems. The second whole belongs to an emerging social art, which yet needs to be developed and created in the years to come’ (ibid.: 14).

The second whole has a parallel with the Gandhian conceptualization of the village republic (part) and its relationship with the group of villages (whole) or individual (part) with the village (whole). The second whole where the part is not determined by the whole but has the same freedom with the whole. The second whole that defies Aristotle’s principle in which the freedom of part exists by its own purpose. Mahatma Gandhi’s intuitive mind could foresee the relationship between the part (village) and the whole (group of villages).

Mahatma Gandhi said that his idea of village swaraj (freedom), ‘is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its vital wants and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity’ (Patil 1989: 112). He says swaraj is a comprehensive term and infinitely greater than the concept of independence (ibid.: 111).

Gandhi’s concept of decentralization is instrumental while understanding the relationship between the whole and the part. He said:

...decentralization of power is possible in a structure consisting of a large number of different villages encompassing each other in concentric circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But, it will be
an oceanic circle, whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village till at last whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units’. (Patil: 113)

Gandhi again said, ‘If there is ever to be a republic of every village in India, then I claim verity for my picture in which the last is equal to the first, or in other words none is to be the first and none the last’ (ibid.). The freedom of individual or the village or the group of villages is not restricted by any force within the system. Figure 1 clearly depicts the relationship between the part and the whole. The evolution is a dynamic relationship where none controls the other but complements each other for individual and collective evolution.

![Figure 1: Freedom of Whole and Part](image)

From the discussion so far two things are becoming very clear. In social systems there is a possibility of two types of wholes, the first where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts and the second where the whole is equivalent to the part in terms of freedom.

Henry Bortoft also distinguishes the two types of wholes and calls them the ‘counterfeit’ and the ‘authentic’ whole. His notions of wholeness are based on different faculties of cognition (Scharmer 1999a: 6).

**The Counterfeit Whole:** It is based on the intellectual mind abstracting from concrete sensual perception. That is, the mind is moving away from the concrete part to get an overview. The result leads to an abstract and non-dynamic notion of the whole.

**The Authentic whole:** It is based on a different cognitive capacity, the intuitive mind that is based on opening some higher organs of perception. The intuitive mind is moving right into the concrete parts in order to encounter the whole. This encounter leads to perceiving the dynamic and living multiplicity of the whole.

Bortoft says that one needs to have an intuitive mind to cognize the authentic whole:

> We cannot know the whole in the way in which we know the things because we cannot recognize the whole as a thing... The whole would be outside its parts in the same way that each part is outside all the other parts. But the whole comes into presence within the parts, and we can’t encounter the whole in the same way that we encounter the parts. We should not think of the whole as if it were a thing’. (ibid.: 7)

Bortoft emphasizes:

If the whole presences within its parts, then a part is a place for the presencing of the whole... a part is special and not accidental, since it must be such as to let the whole come
into presence. This specialty of the part is particularly important because it shows us the way to the whole. It clearly indicates that the way to the whole is into and through the parts. (Scharmer: 7)

It is similar to the concept of Gandhi’s concentric circle of relationship between the part and the whole. The Gandhian conception of village, where the presence of the whole can be intuitively seen in the part and vice versa. As Bortoft rightly said, it needs intuitive capacity and Gandhi is good at cognizing the presence of the whole in the part. For Gandhi individual freedom is the crux in understanding the concept of the village republic. The oceanic circles clearly convey the nature of the presence of the whole in the part and the part in the whole. This intuitive mind is to be developed in the system or among all the parts to cognize the true relationships for optimum productivity.

Since the part has enough freedom in the system, there is always a possibility for the part to evolve much faster than the evolution of the whole. The rate of evolution of the part may be faster than the rate of evolution of the whole, but in no case does the part becomes greater than the whole because the whole also evolves along with the evolution of the part. The part doesn’t evolve at the cost of the whole but complements the evolution of the whole. A state certainly comes to the part where it can say that I am equivalent to the whole or I am the total. This is not to undermine the whole but to complement the whole. The part’s conception of ‘I am the Total’ is looking extremely synonymous with the concept of ‘Aham Brahma Asmi’ a mahavakya from Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (Parthasarthy 2001: 331). The cognitive mind is necessary to experience the state of ‘Aham Brahma Asmi’ to materialize the optimum productivity of an individual as well as the system as a whole. ‘Aham Brahma Asmi’ serves the society more productively.

Take the example of Microsoft; it is generally equated with Bill Gates or he is the ‘Aham Brahma Asmi’ (not in the literal sense) of Microsoft. Though Bill Gates is a small part of Microsoft, the freedom Bill Gates has for his evolution accommodates all the individual freedoms of all the parts of the larger whole. The evolution of Bill Gates as a part accommodates sufficient space for all the other parts in the system to actualize their individual freedoms as a whole. Hence, that the whole of Microsoft appears to be equal to Bill Gates. Bill Gates’s freedom as an individual doesn’t come in the way of others’ freedom in the organization but complements and enhances others’ evolutions as well.

Ryosuke Ohashi’s argument is quite interesting. He says, ‘The relation between the whole totality and the individual is not continuous, but discontinuous. This discontinuity requires a “place”’ (Nonaka and Scharmer 2000: 10). Microsoft could provide the sufficient ‘place’ for each individual employee to express his own absolute uniqueness in the organization. In the traditional type of relationship the part is determined by its position in the already existing whole. A new type of that relationship would give much more freedom to the parts. In this mode, the parts would not only reflect but also enhance and co-create an emerging new whole (ibid.: 16).

Microsoft could create thousands of millionaires among its employees while Bill Gates has become the richest in USA. Bill Gates has his individual identity and his own absolute uniqueness; so is the case with every employee. The whole of Microsoft can be as a presence in the part, the Bill Gates. Each employee in Microsoft has his level of
freedom according to his level of cognition and his freedom is never hampered because the space provided by Bill Gates as a part in the system is much broader to fill everyone’s need for freedom. Since there is enough freedom for everyone, each employee in Microsoft thinks, he is an entrepreneur.

Every employee in Microsoft is in oceanic circles, no circle infringes the freedom of another circle hence the highest wealth creation and productivity in the organization can be attained. The evolution of an employee is not hampered by Microsoft as a whole, but his growth depends on his individual effort. As Bortoft rightly said, ‘Man knows himself to the extent he knows the world; he becomes aware of himself only within the world, and aware of the world within himself.’

Every object, well contemplated, opens up a new organ within us’ (Scharmer 1999a: 8). Bill Gates’s Microsoft is a well contemplated object that opened a different and productive world.

Mahatma Gandhi’s oceanic circles and Bortoft’s authentic whole have to be analyzed in the light of Upanishadic mahavakyas, the four aphorisms to manufacture innovative relationships that can be applied in the corporate world for higher productivity. The two wholes can be seen as two different orientations of an organization, the biological orientation and the social orientation. Figure 2 depicts the two wholes of a system.

Mahatma Gandhi’s conceptualization of concentric circles of relationship between the part and the whole and cognition of this relationship with his intuitive mind has provided a direction to

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**Figure 2**

*Evolution of Whole-Part Relationship*

![Whole > Part](counterfeit-whole.png)

*Counterfeit Whole*

- Part in Bondage

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**Whole = Part**

*Authentic Whole*

- Part in Freedom

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**Biological Conceptualization**

- Aristotle
- Karl Marx
- Orwell 1984

- I am the State
  
  (Louis XIV)

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**Social Conceptualization**

- Mahatma Gandhi
- Henri Bortoft
- Humberto Maturana
- Ryo-Uski Ohashi
- Aham Brahma Asmi
  
  (Brihadaranyaka
  
  Upanishad)
the Indian Constitution to materialize his vision among the people. The point is how to implement his ideas. Mahatma Gandhi (1948) prescribes a litmus test for the operationalization of his vision of swaraj (freedom) in the form of a talisman as follows:

I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man [woman] whom you may have seen, and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him [her]. Will he [she] gain anything by it? Will it restore him [her] to a control over his [her] own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to swaraj [freedom] for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and your self melt away. (Chandra 1990: 0)

The Indian Constitution has been applying Gandhi’s talisman to materialize the dream of Gandhian swaraj (freedom). The Directive principles of State Policy (Pylee 1999: 132–46), Art-40 says that, ‘to organize village Panchayats as units of self-government’ (ibid.: 134), that is, villages are not at the command of State or Union Government but the relationship is in terms of concentric circles. To give a constitutional status to the Village Panchayats, Parliament has enacted the 73rd amendment bill,⁴ to provide villages a concentric circle relationship with the State and the Union Government. The freedom of the village has become almost absolute and a village can exhibit its uniqueness now. The scenario of Panchayat Raj Institutions in India has moved from ‘counterfeit whole’ to ‘authentic whole’ providing enough choices to the villages. Now millions of people in India are able to cognize the freedom of part in the whole or with the whole. Freedom of part is a reality in India. Village evoloves not at the cost of State or Union Government but complements the state and union government’s evolution. The shift of thinking is now from part-to-whole-to-part. It is the reversal of Aristotle’s whole. It is the presence of the whole in the parts and vice versa. It is the emergence of dynamic whole rather than the static whole. It is ultimately the realization of abundant freedom to the part.

**Good Leader and Great Leader**

The difference of good and great has become very prominent in the corporate world after the publication of the book, *Good to Great* where Jim Collins says, ‘greatness is not a function of circumstance. Greatness, it turns out, is largely a matter of conscious choice’ (Collins 2001: 11). It doesn’t mean that good leaders can’t make conscious choices but the point is what is the depth of your choice; what is the locus of your choice, is it heart or head?

The economics professor W. Brain Arthur says, ‘What counts is where you’re coming from in your inner self’ (Jaworski et al. 1999: 15). He treats Steve Jobs, Sam Walton and Bill Gates as the great leaders because they know how to distance themselves from the problem and expose themselves to something different. You wait and wait and let this experience well up into something appropriate. In a sense, there is no decision-making. What to do just becomes obvious. You can’t rush it. Much of it depends on where you’re coming from and who you are as a person (ibid.: 15).

Good leaders transplant old frameworks, like BPR, TQM, Six Sigma, BSC, and so on, to bring the changes in the organization but can’t cognize the readiness of followers and the appropriateness
of the framework. Great leaders just sit back and allow the appropriate structure to form. Sam Walton didn’t just use some old framework to create Wal-Mart. He has waited till the emergence of appropriate structure in his inner self then he acted on that to create Wal-Mart (Jaworski: 15). Wal-Mart is discovered in his inner self.

Steve Jobs, once answered a query of Professor Richard Rumelt in 1998 on longer-term strategy; he said “I am going to wait for the next big thing.” Jobs didn’t say, “We’re cutting costs and we’re making alliances.” He was waiting until the right moment for that predatory leap, which for him was Pixer and then, in a bigger way, the iPod. That very predatory approach of leaping through the window of opportunity and staying focused on that big wins—not on maintenance activities—is what distinguishes a real entrepreneurial strategy’ Dan and Lenny 2007: 5). The predatory approaches of Gandhi must be seen from the entrepreneurial perspective.

Mahatma Gandhi had not imported any frameworks and imposed them on the people while leading the freedom struggle. He acted only after the emergence of a new framework in his inner self. He said:

I have never created a situation in my life. I have one qualification which many of you do not possess. I can almost instinctively feel what is stirring in the hearts of masses. And when I feel that the forces of good are dimly stirring within, I seize upon them and build up a programme. And they respond. People say that I had created a situation; but I had done nothing except giving shape to what was already there. (Chandra 1988: 60)

A great leader always senses the readiness of followers and provides a channel to the people’s aspirations. Mahatma provided a direction to the dynamic energy of masses in the freedom struggle. He said:

My influence, great as it may appear to outsiders, is strictly limited. I may have considerable influence to conduct a campaign for redress of popular grievances because people are ready and need a helper. But I have no influence to direct people’s energy in a channel in which they have no interest’. (ibid.: 60)

A great leader never owns the credit. He is very humble and acts like a Level 5 Executive (Collins 2001: 20). The characteristic of Level 5 Executive is humility and will. Mahatma Gandhi’s humility can be noticed in his words:

My prestige doesn’t count. It has no independent value of its own…. India will rise or fall by the quality of the sum total of the acts of her many millions. Individuals however high they may be are of no account except in so far as they represent the many millions’. (ibid.: 60)

Great leaders act only after the emergence of new frameworks in their mind’s eye before starting a programme. They don’t rush but let a picture emerge by itself. Gandhi was truly a great leader because his non-violent freedom struggle was a framework emerged in his heart and that has proved right.

Systems thinking, the fifth discipline as Peter M. Senge names it is the glue that ties the other four disciplines—personal mastery, mental models, shared vision and team learning. Mahatma Gandhi mastered the fifth discipline to integrate the four disciplines while leading the Indian Freedom Movement. People with various levels of personal mastery; groups with multi mental
models—women, Hindu, Muslim, businessmen, depressed classes, peasants, masses and so on; teams at village, town, district, state and national level prepared to face the British; shared vision of everyone towards Indian independence all integrated with the thinking of Gandhi, the systems thinking. One can’t become a great leader unless he is first a systems thinker; hence, systems thinking was a by-product of Gandhi’s journey for truth and his life was the laboratory for experiments on systems thinking to arrive at new insights.

**Gandhian Strategy to Fight the British**

One of the threads of systems thinking is seeing interrelationships rather than things and seeing patterns of change rather than static snapshots. Mahatma Gandhi had a foresight to see the possible interrelationships between Indians and the mighty British. Gandhi was also very good at understanding the patterns of change while fighting the British. Gandhi went a step deeper to understand the principle behind the pattern and subsequently its impact on the events. Gandhi operated from the level of principle rather than from pattern or event. He knew the deeper dynamics of interrelationships of British and Indians. Russell L. Ackoff says, managers should manage the interactions (not actions) of their subordinates to manage them effectively (Ackoff 2004). Gandhi went a step ahead and operated from a higher level, the principle where one can understand the basis of interactions and interrelationships: the three levels (principle—pattern—event) of thinking coming from three inner levels (wisdom—knowledge—information/data) that can be seen in Figure 3.

For Gandhi, politics with principle was sacred and he considered ‘politics without principle’ as one of the Seven Deadly Sins. The Seven Deadly Sins that were propounded by Gandhi are as follows:

- Wealth without Work
- Pleasure without Conscience
- Science without Humanity
- Knowledge without Character
- Politics without Principle
- Commerce without Morality
- Worship without Sacrifice

The Gandhian strategy was rooted in ‘politics with principles’ while fighting the British and was by principle non-violent and non-linear in its nature. Systems thinking is also inherently non-linear and of course non-violent too at a deeper level according to Gandhi.

**Non-Violent**

Mahatma Gandhi’s strategy suited primarily Indian psyche to attract the masses towards the freedom movement. He had deliberately chosen non-violent strategy to fight the mighty British. He said:

> Violence is inherently undemocratic, violence is more characteristic of small secret societies which believe in putsch tactics. But when the extent of society to be mobilized is the whole mass, methods and techniques have to be open, public and ones which even well meaning less-adventurous persons could also wield and in which secrecy and violence had no place. (Patil 1989: 11)

Gandhi had a foresight while formulating non-violent strategy to fight the British and that has
been proved right. The important insight involved here was that the organized might of the British Raj could only be countered by the organized strength of the entire mass of population (Janashakti) and when the whole population is involved, violent methods are out of place (Patil: 11). For Gandhi, non-violence is a principle because he could see in his mind’s eye the repercussions, if he had mobilized the people to fight the British based on violence. The British suppressed many violent strategies of Indian patriots who sacrificed their lives in the process. The point is that good intentions are not enough. Operating at the level of events can’t provide any solutions. One has to go very deep into the possible interrelations and the principles behind the interactions while formulating a strategy. The strategy emerges if you go very deep into your inner self, and Gandhi could formulate the non-violent strategy to suit Indian ecology.

Mahatma Gandhi started the first mass movement in India, Non-Cooperation Movement in right earnest in January, 1921 and the whole movement was abruptly called off on 11 February, 1922, at his insistence, following the news of the burning alive of 22 policemen by angry peasants at Chauri Chaura in Gorakpur district of Uttar Pradesh on 5 February, 1922. Though the movement started as non-violent, some militant sections, angered by the repressive policy of the British were in favour
of giving up the non-violence dogma. Gandhi felt that people have neither properly understood nor learnt the practice of non-violence without which non-cooperation and civil disobedience movements could not be successful. He also believed that it would be quite easy for the British to repress violent movements as the people have no means of fighting against the well-armed British. Gandhi could see the principle behind the event of Chauri Chaura, where as the other freedom fighters—Lala Lajpat Rai, Motilal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose, and so on, criticized him against suspension of the movement because for them a principle is an event or at the most a pattern, that is, they can see many patterns in a principle. Subhas Chandra Bose said, ‘To sound the order of retreat, when public enthusiasm was reaching boiling point, was nothing short of a national calamity’ (Prasad 1995: 138). Bose could see in Chauri Chaura an event or snapshot but Gandhi could see from a higher dimension. Bose could see a non-violent intention behind the incident while criticizing Gandhi but intentions and principles are different. For Gandhi, Chauri Chaura was not an event but a pattern and above all the hidden principle of ‘violence’. Gandhi sensed what could happen if he allowed the non-cooperation movement to continue, hence he called off the movement. Gandhi was so wise to see a pattern or a principle in an event and this resembles a verse (IV–18) in the Bhagavatgita (Radhakrishnan 1977: 163): ‘He who sees inaction in action and who sees action in inaction, he is the one endowed with wisdom among human beings. He is joined in yoga, a performer of complete action’.

Great leaders can visualize the interactions in actions (events/snapshot) and the principle (inaction—the deeper originating state) behind the events. Gandhi could understand the violent principle behind the event of Chauri Chaura, hence the non-violent strategy.

**Non-Linear**

Non-linear thinking is the heart of systems thinking. The relationship between two persons ‘A’ and ‘B’ is not continuous, but discontinuous. The linear thinking connects ‘A’ and ‘B’ in only one way but human beings are not ‘things’ and their relationship is dynamic and multi-dimensional and the pattern unfolds in many ways. One dimensional relationship is basically a mechanistic view. Non-linear thinking provides enough space for evolution in the organization because people evolve in multi-dimensions. In chaos it is difficult to find a linear path that reaches the destination. Within uncertainty it is more important to identify direction rather than destination. It is not doing things right but doing the right thing that takes us to the destination fast. In systems thinking the fast is slow, that means if you look for short cuts it delays the process more. It is better to do the right thing wrong than the wrong thing right. In Chauri Chaura, peasants killed policemen successfully, but was it the right thing? Doing the right thing right makes the evolution and transformation faster. Gandhiji had done the right thing right.

The Gandhian strategy of the Indian Freedom Movement was described as Struggle-Truce-Struggle (S–T–S), a non-linear relationship between one level of struggle and another level of struggle. The modern historian, Bipan Chandra says, ‘The entire political process of S–T–S was an upward spiraling one, which also assumed that the freedom struggle would pass through several stages, ending with the transfer of power by the
colonial regime itself” (Chandra 1989: 313). The non-linear relationship is depicted in Figure 4:

![Figure 4](image)

Jawaharlal Nehru criticized Mahatma Gandhi on the notion of winning freedom through stages:

Real power could not be won gradually “bit by bit” or by “two annas and four annas.” The citadel—state-power—had to be seized, though through a non-violent mass struggle. Thus, to S–T–S he counter posed the strategy of S–V (V stands for victory) or the permanent waging of mass struggle till victory was won. (ibid.: 314)

Figure 4 also shows the relationship in a linear form. Nehru wanted to get freedom fast but Gandhi reached there first.

Ultimately, it is the systems thinker who wins the race and Gandhi proved to the world the basis of non-linear and non-violent thinking to reach the destination very fast but it appeared to be very slow. Slow and steady wins the race is true in the case of the Indian Freedom Movement. Foresight always wins in the long run and Gandhi was the forerunner of it.

Mahatma Gandhi was very much influenced by Bhagavad-Gita and its importance in his life can be found in his words such as,

When doubts haunt me, when disappointments stare me in the face and when I see not one ray of light on the horizon I turn to Bhagavadgita and find a verse to comfort me and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming sorrow. My life has been full of external tragedies and if they had not left any visible and indelible effect on me I owe to the teachings of Bhagavad-Gita (Giri 2005: 6).

Mahatma Gandhi always made a conscious balance of outer world with the inner world. He said, ‘One man cannot do right in one department of life whilst he is occupied in doing wrong in any other department. Life is one indivisible whole’ (Covey 2004: 150). The relationship between the part and the whole was a continuous struggle in the heart of the Mahatma to offer the concentric circles orientation to the world. The influence can be seen presently in the corporate talks as C.K. Prahalad says, ‘the quest is to develop a capitalism that puts the individual at the center of the universe, placing employees and customers first so that they can benefit shareholders’ (Engardio 2006: 89).

Gandhi was a great leader because he could visualize the emerging whole while formulating many innovative strategies to lead the people into higher planes. He was also a disbeliever in short cuts to any achievement because every solution creates a new problem. He was also aware that obvious solutions do more harm than good. His foresight could be seen in his non-linear and non-violent approach to the freedom struggle. Now, systems thinkers in the world have to look towards the story of *My Experiments with Truth* (Gandhi 1927) and the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* to search for jewels in the mine of the Mahatma’s life, a true example to the world, and particularly to the corporate world.
NOTES

1. www.dialogonleadership.org, the project was sponsored by Mckinsey & Company and the Society for Organizational Learning (formerly MIT Centre for Organizational Learning). The interviews and the summary papers are accessible as free downloads.
2. Claus Otto Scharmer is co-founder and Lecturer of the MIT Leadership Lab.
   1. Pragnanam Brahma: Consciousness is Brahman (Aitareya Upanishad–Rigveda)
   2. Tat Twam Asi: That thou art (Chandogya Upanishad – Sama Veda)
   3. Ayam Atma Brahma: This Self is Brahman (Mandukya Upanishad–Atharva Veda)
4. Aham Brahma Asmi: I am Brahman (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad–Yajur Veda).
   (*This is a landmark amendment of the Constitution, which provides for an elaborate system of establishing Panchayats, as units of self-government, which for the first time in the constitutional history of independent India, details the constitution of Panchayats, duration for which they would function, membership of Panchayats, constitution of Finance Commission to review financial position of Panchayats and several other related matters. It also adds a new schedule, namely, Eleventh Schedule to the Constitution, listing 29 subjects which are to be handled by the Panchayats.)

REFERENCES
