The Tiger’s Nature, but Not the Tiger: Bal Gangadhar Tilak as Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi’s Counter-Guru

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_Hind Swaraj_’s importance is born out of a dialogue with a figure whom Gandhian commentary has all but deleted: Bal Gangadhar Tilak. Much of Gandhi’s thought and writing has to negotiate the central problem of Tilak’s dominance of India politics through the first two decades of the twentieth century and the astonishing, and unexpected, symmetry between many of their concerns. This article explores the _distance_ that separates Gandhi and Tilak ethically and politically but also attempts to highlight the troubling _intimacy_ of the deep structures of their philosophy.

**South Africa, London, Bombay**

There is a striking numerological coincidence between the writing of Gandhi’s _Hind Swaraj_ and Tilak’s 1908 trial for sedition, which gestures to a much more consequential mirroring underlying the argument of this article. _Hind Swaraj_ was written over the course of ten days, between November 13 and 22, 1909, as Gandhi returned to South Africa aboard the _Kildonan Castle_ (Parel 1997: xiv). Sixteen months earlier, between July 13 and 22, 1908, Tilak stood trial in the third Criminal Sessions of the Bombay High Court, following which he would be sentenced to six years’ imprisonment, most of it spent in solitary confinement.

These dates, although they seem to glint (to recall a Benjaminian metaphor) like gleams of silver pointing a way through a dark mine, signify—of
course—nothing. However, they help frame a profound similitude between Gandhi's and Tilak's philosophical approach to the question of liberation, the self, and the role of violence. This similitude takes the form of a mirroring: point-by-point similarity characterized by inversion but lacking topological transformation.

Most accounts of *Hind Swaraj* have positioned it antagonistically in opposition to Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (figs. 1–2), whom Gandhi had met during his London stay at Shyamji Krishnavarma’s India House in Highgate. Savarkar’s *Indian War of Independence, 1857* (written in Marathi in 1908) had been translated into English, printed in Holland, and privately published in London (and promptly proscribed) on May 10, 1909. This date was itself a strange echo of “the war begun on the 10th of May 1857” (Joshi 2008: vii, viii, xvii).

The Gandhi-Savarkar dualism also works well as a means of defining the specificity and originality of Gandhi’s understanding of *swaraj*, the term that Gandhi substituted for *swarajya* (self-government) in the first English edition of 1910 (Parel 1997: lxii). Although Savarkar stages *swaraj* as a freedom from an interconnectedness (“the chain of slavery” [Savarkar 2008: 11]), he also makes explicitly clear in the first chapter of *Indian War of Independence* (which bears the title “Swadharma and Swaraj”) that nationalistic self-making was a subsidiary operation of gendered divine and territorial identifications. Commenting on the Oudh Talukdars (crucial participants in the early stages of the 1857 insurrection), Savarkar (2008: 16) argues that rather than “murderous mutineers,” they should be regarded as “noble patriots” who fought for “King and the Motherland—for Swaraj and Swadesh!” The king referred to here is Wajid Ali Shah. Note the gendered split here that positions Indians as subjects of a nation: a self-country that was Bharat Mata and a self-rule that was defined through royal power.

In Savarkar, sovereignty is vested in the ruler and in territory. For Gandhi, by contrast—and this is unquestionably *Hind Swaraj*’s lasting ethico-political legacy—*swaraj* involved a reform of the self (Gandhi 1997: 117) and the duty to one’s self that enables one to serve others (Gandhi 1997: 118). In Savarkar there is no sense of the questioning self-sovereignty that is so fundamental to Gandhi’s investigation of the possibility of *swaraj*. This is one way that Savarkar is so helpful to Gandhi scholars: he serves as a convenient foil upon which to stage the clarification of Gandhi’s originality.

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1. The metaphor is Walter Benjamin’s in a letter to Theodor W. Adorno, November 10, 1930 (Adorno and Benjamin 1999: 7).
There are undeniably good historical reasons to read *Hind Swaraj* alongside the activities of Savarkar. Gandhi would later recall (in 1921) that during his 1909 visit to London he had met “every known Indian anarchist” there (Parel 1997: xv). Eight days before his arrival in England, Madanlal Dhingra had—with the encouragement of Savarkar—murdered William Curzon Wyllie, the political aide to the secretary of state for India, in South Kensington. Dhingra was convicted and executed while Gandhi was in London, and three months later, on October 24, Gandhi spoke alongside Savarkar and Haji Habib at a subscription dinner organized by Indian students (R. Gandhi 2007: 139).  

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defends his presentation of the text as a dialogue as being considered, in Gujarati, “the best method of treating difficult subjects” and as also reflecting dialogues that had actually taken place, between, Anthony J. Parel (1997: 6n3) notes, Gandhi and Krishnavarma and Savarkar. Later in Hind Swaraj, the Editor’s having suggested that his interlocutor wants “the tiger’s nature, but not the tiger” (Gandhi 1997: 28) finds the Reader invoking Herbert Spencer, whose call for liberation from oppression graced the masthead of Krishnavarma’s Indian Sociologist.

But Savarkar can also be understood as the localized sign of a much more general problem from Gandhi’s perspective: Tilak (figs. 3–4), the chief opponent of Gandhi’s political guru Gopal Krishna Gokhale. It was Tilak who had after all recommended Savarkar for the Shivaji scholarship (controlled by Krishnavarma) that enabled Savarkar to travel to London. Tilak is never mentioned directly in Hind Swaraj, but his presence can be felt throughout the text. His papers Kesari and Mahratta are present in the reference to the “several newspapers” that write disrespectfully of Gokhale, the “outspoken writings in the press,” and Tilak’s political alliance is referred to as the “impatient party” (Gandhi 1997: 16, 21, 22). Hind Swaraj, written between England and South Africa, is of course directed to India, and in 1909 Indian politics in the wake of the Surat split was dichotomized between Gokhale’s “moderates” and Tilak’s “extremists.”

4. Parmanand, a freedom fighter, had been in prison with Savarkar in the Andaman Islands and with Gandhi in Yerawad jail. He was interviewed by Harindra Srivastava (1983: 28).

5. The 1907 Congress meeting at Surat ended in an impasse between “moderates” led by Gokhale, whose tutorship Gandhi willingly accepted, and “extremists” led by Tilak.
Figure 3  Bal Gangadhar Tilak photographed by Narayan Vinayak Virkar, ca. 1915. Private collection
Figure 4  Postmortem photograph of Bal Gangadhar Tilak by Narayan Vinayak Virkar, 1920. Private collection
“Factory Civilization” and “Gigantic Machinery”

The juxtaposition of Gandhi with Tilak, rather than Savarkar, is desirable because much of what Hind Swaraj declares and theorizes is prefigured in Tilak’s speeches. My suggestion is that while Savarkar provides a productive antithesis and counterpoint to Gandhi’s thought, Tilak is a much more intractable figure— one who as an “extremist” stood opposed to Gandhi’s Gokhalean “moderation” but whose theorization of the centrality of a self-redemption through swaraj from the colonial Zeugganze was astonishingly similar. Addressing the Shivaji Coronation Festival in Pune on June 25, 1907, for instance, Tilak demanded that his audience consider whether “your present conduct is self-respectful to yourselves or useful to the nation” (Tilak 1919: 78). Tilak’s question concerned the ethical nature of selves complicit with colonialism: “You are yourselves the useful lubricants which enable the gigantic machinery to work so smoothly” (Tilak 1919: 77), he said in words that might have come directly from the later Hind Swaraj. “Though downtrodden,” he continued, “you must be conscious of your power of making the administration impossible if you but choose to make it so. It is you who manage the rail-road, and the telegraph, it is you who make settlements and collect revenues... You must consider whether you cannot turn your hand to better use for your nation than drudging on in this fashion” (Tilak 1919: 77). Perhaps most significant, Tilak underlines his own self-understanding that his project is not simply a refusal of colonial rule but that it reflects a more profound turning away from the fundamental epistemology of colonialism: “It is true that what we seek may seem like a revolution in the sense that it means a complete change in the ‘theory’ of the Government of India as now put forward by the bureaucracy” (Tilak 1919: 76).

Gandhi’s objection to violence is grounded in his diagnosis of what Martin Heidegger would later call Zeugganze—a “totality of tools” (Danto 1989: 28), a complex of instruments, men, and arms, or what Tilak had termed the “gigantic machinery” (1919: 77). For Heidegger, “any given tool is defined with respect to the remaining tools in a systematic totality” (Danto 1989: 28). Hence “the hammer refers to the nail and the nail to the boards and the board to the saw and the adze” (Danto 1989: 28). It is not possible to invent just the nail, and correspondingly equally impossible to dis-invent it. It would be impossible to loose arrows alone: “They go only when the bow goes, the quiver goes” (Danto 1989: 28). The mode of armed aggression that Gandhi analyzes describes with great prescience

6. In the standard English (unattributed) translation of Being and Time, Zeugganze and Zeugganzheit are glossed as “equipmental totality” and “totality of equipment” (Heidegger 1962: 522).
the Zeugganze of the Mumbai 2008 terrorist attacks. Here “random terror” was hardly a reflection of freedom through violence; rather, it reflected the continuous imprisonment of a “gigantic machinery”—enormous infrastructural foundations and interconnectedness, chiefly Pakistani (training camps, state-supplied arms, finance, and telecommunications).

It is a parallel interconnectedness, a similar enchainment, that vitiates, in the Gandhian view, any self-liberation through violence. One system (colonialism) might be displaced, but Indians will come to be enslaved by the new system mobilized in this process. This is the “factory civilization” to which Hind Swaraj endlessly returns, that European morality indebted far more to the Industrial Revolution than to the Enlightenment. The clearest statement of this occurs in chapter 19: “Machinery is like a snake-hole which may contain from one to a hundred snakes. Where there is machinery there are large cities; and where there are large cities, there are tram-cars and railways; and there only does one see electric light” (Gandhi 1997: 110). The awareness of the systematicity of totality presents Gandhi with difficult choices. Like Tilak, he knows that just the nail, or just the arrow, cannot be eliminated: a more profound confrontation is required, one that is unsettling to twenty-first-century pragmatism. In the conclusion to Hind Swaraj, Gandhi (1997: 117) insists, accordingly, on the need for an ethics wholly severed from the chains of Zeugganze: “It is better that bodies remain diseased than that they are cured through the instrumentality of the diabolical vivisection that is practiced in European schools of medicine.”

Tilak’s view of the colonial state’s violence was very similar to that espoused by Gandhi. However, whereas Gandhi derived an essentially antihistorical conclusion, namely, that all violence would be forever systemically contaminated (and contaminating), Tilak’s view was resolutely historicist. He explicitly acknowledged the “gigantic machinery” of the colonial state, but he also believed that history and an evolving techne had delivered a very different alternative practice of violence, one liberated from a complex of instruments and transformed into a knowledge that bore within it the possibility of a new self-making.

“Not a thing like muskets or guns”

Before discussing the matter of Tilak’s trial, I must briefly recount some earlier events, the interpretation of which would land Tilak in jail. These events have much to say about new, fluid, and explosive forms of communication and the reactive colonial Zeugganze that they also called forth.

In 1907 the Bengali patriot Hem Chandra Das carefully cut an oblong hole in
Herbert Broom’s 1,075-page *Commentary on the Common Law Designed as Introductory to Its Study*. He then placed a Cadbury’s Cocoa tin containing picric acid, detonators, and a trigger device in the excavated space. This biblio-bomb was then wrapped in brown paper and taken by one Paresh Mallick (wearing the uniform of a postal peon) to the home of Chief Presidency Magistrate Douglas H. Kingsford, who had recently sentenced two of Das’s colleagues. Kingsford assumed that the package was a book returned by a friend and put it—unopened—on a shelf, while the anxious revolutionaries waited for reports of the explosion (Heehs 1993: 134–35).

On April 30, 1908, another Bengali, Khudiram Bose, threw a bomb at a carriage in Muzaffarpur that he believed contained Kingsford, who all along remained unaware that Das’s biblio-bomb still lay on his shelves. The carriage contained two women—a Mrs. and Miss Kennedy—who were both killed. Within two days Bose was arrested. Bose was found guilty and then executed on August 11, 1908. His trial and execution as depicted in chromolithographs from the 1930s powerfully evoke the complex of instruments—the retributive technology of the state with its interconnected infrastructure of telephones, temporality, and death. *Khudiram’s Trial*, printed by Joya publishers (fig. 5), depicted the hapless Bose imprisoned in an elaborate colonial “carpentered universe.” The picture space is consumed by a set of vigorous diagonals that map the linear architecture of the court and its areas for the plaintiff, public, and judge. On the wall at the back a clock ticks away and a calendar marks the regularity of time, what Rabindranath Tagore (1921: 121) had earlier described as “those dreary, deadly days, so preciously equal in weight” that he associated with colonial Calcutta. At the bottom of the picture a telephone stands on the judge’s desk, its trailing wire gesturing to the “gigantic machinery.”

An image of Bose’s execution by the artist Brojen (fig. 6) places the court at the top right, where we again see Bose trapped by the architecture and linearity of colonial justice. In the foreground is an elaborate gibbet from which Bose is suspended by complex pulleys, waiting for the trap door beneath him to open at a time indicated by the watch that a red-suited colonial official scrutinizes on the right. The colonial gallows becomes a visual topos that would be much repeated in later decades, encompassing Bhagat Singh (fig. 7) and (as we shall see below) Nathuram Godse, Gandhi’s assassin.

Tilak’s trial—the year before *Hind Swaraj* was written—focused on an article published in *Kesari* on June 9, 1908, which was centrally preoccupied with the question of the colonial Zeugganze. Titled “These Remedies Are Not Lasting,” Tilak’s article expounds a mode of violence, and of self-making, detached from colonial industrialism. In short, he advocates a vernacular technology of small-scale bomb making freed from the contamination of Zeugganze. There is,
Figure 5  Khudiram’s Trial. Joya picture publishers, Calcutta. Offset chromolithograph, ca. 1940. Private collection
Khudiram’s execution. By Brojen, ca. 1930s–1940s. Private collection
he wrote (in words that mark his distance from Gandhi), “as wide a difference between the bombs in Europe desiring to destroy society and the bombs in Bengal as between earth and heaven” (Tilak in Kelkar 1908: Ex. D.: 17).

Like Gandhi, however, Tilak’s starting point is the dominance of the colonial-military complex. In the 1907 Shivaji speech (quoted from above), he noted that “a single machine-gun showering hundreds of bullets per minute will quite suffice for our largest public meetings” (Tilak 1919: 69). Gandhi in *Hind Swaraj* (1997: 36) writes of how “it is possible to take away thousands of lives by one man working from behind a gun from a hill.” It is against this potentiality of the “gigantic machinery” that Tilak developed in the 1908 article a distinction between what he calls “the magical practices, the magical lore of Bengal” and “muskets and guns” (Tilak in Kelkar 1908: Ex. D.: 19). Muskets and guns stand in for a system of industrial arms production whose infrastructural necessities make them easily controllable by the government.

**Figure 7** Colonialism’s “gigantic machinery.”
By contrast, “the bomb,” he told Kesari readers, “is not a thing like muskets or guns”; “it is a simple sport of science”:

Muskets and guns may be taken away from the subjects by means of the Arms Act; and the manufacture, too, of guns and muskets without the permission of Government, may be stopped; but is it possible to stop or do away with the bomb by means of laws or the supervision of officials or the busy swarming of the detective police? The bomb has more the form of knowledge, it is a (kind of) witchcraft, it is a charm, an amulet. (Quoted in Kelkar 1908: 19)

Tilak’s argument appears to be that bombs should be thought of as a kind of “knowledge” because their production was inscribed primarily through information rather than technology: “It has not much the features of a visible object manufactured in a big factory. Big factories are necessary for the bombs required by the military forces of Government, but not much (in the way of) materials is necessary to prepare five or ten bombs required by violent turn-headed persons. Virendra’s big factory of bombs (was stored in) one or two jars and five or ten bottles” (Tilak in Kelkar 1908: Ex. D.: 19). Vernacular bombs are not marked by an obvious visibility, and they can be produced from materials stored in a few bottles. What is more, the knowledge needed to produce vernacular bombs is simple: “The formula of the bomb does not at all appear to be a lengthy one and (its) process also is very short indeed” (Tilak in Kelkar 1908: Ex. D.: 19). This is a view of a knowledge economy, a cunning and commitment liberated from the constraints of “gigantic machinery.”

The judge in his summing up had sections of the disputed translations written out for him in what he termed a “readable calligraphy.” The original of the passage that was translated as “The bomb has more the form of knowledge, it is a (kind of) witchcraft, it is a charm, an amulet” was “hi ek jadu ahe// ha ek mantra todga ahe” (Kelkar 1908: “Judge’s Summing Up,” 5). In Marathi (as in Hindi) jadu connotes “magic, sorcery, witchcraft” (Vaze 1928: 206). Likewise, mantra, as in other North Indian languages, connotes “a charm, an incantation” (Vaze 1928: 443). For todga, the Arya-Bhushan Marathi-English Dictionary gives “Any wild, magical or superstitious device for the removal of demon[ic] influence or disease; a charm, an amulet, a spell” (Vaze 1928: 263).

Gandhi leaves us in no doubt about his regard for “Professor Gokhale,” his guru from whose poverty and humility he felt he had learned greatly. But could we think about Tilak as—perversely—Gandhi’s “counter-guru”? On the face of it this is absurd: Hind Swaraj is dedicated to the refutation and diminishment of Tilak and his “impatience.” Hind Swaraj makes a set of transcendent claims for
nonviolence as truth that appear to leave absolutely no space for Tilak. And yet, in much the same manner that Shruti Kapila (2007: 124–25) was drawn to the curiosity of the Gujarati socialist Indulal Yagnik’s equal fascination with Gandhi and Krishnavarma (he wrote biographies of both of them in the 1930s, as indeed it might be noted did Harbilas Sarda), and encouraged also by Faisal Devji’s inspiring experimental conjoining of Gandhi with al-Qaeda (2008: 46), I sense a curiously intimate dialogue between these unlikely interlocutors.

“Negatives that cure thirty-six diseases”

One element of this intimacy reflected Gandhi’s habitation of an antithetical position that through the very principle of its negation reinscribed the practices from which it sought escape: nonviolence was doomed to name the violence that it opposed. Against these paradoxes, intimacies, and uncertainties we need to place Gandhi’s many self-present claims for nonviolence as truth, for nonviolence as positivity freed from the negation that is continually asserted by its antithetical prefix. Gandhi’s Autobiography presents a narrative scattered with epiphanies. Working in Champaran, for instance, he records that “it is no exaggeration, but the literal truth, to say that . . . I was face to face with God, Ahimsa and truth” (Gandhi 2009: 367). But such claims, which we might after Paul de Man, and ultimately Jacques Derrida, think of as “temptations of permanence,” are powerful cultural errors that, if read sensitively, reveal their own impossibility. Ahimsa cannot make a self-present claim, for it is always the supplementary other of another, a supplement to the power of himsa. The “sword of passive resistance,” Gandhi wrote (1997: 94), “needs no scabbard.” But did it require a counterpart other? (See figs. 8–9.) Gandhi himself almost seems to acknowledge this in various ways. In chapter 16 he quotes the Gujarati proverb that he translated as “One negative cures thirty-six diseases” (Parel [1997: 85] notes that “negative” substitutes for the Gujarati word nanno, which carries the sense of a clear “no”). Chapters 2 and 3 elaborate a theory of indebtedness to “unrest” reminiscent of John Milton’s argument in the Areopagitica about the necessity of evil for the definition of what is good.7 At such moments Gandhi makes clear the necessity of “vice” in the constitution of “human virtue.” Gandhi writes about the awakening that took place after the partition of Bengal and says that “for this we have to be grateful to Lord Curzon” (Gandhi 1997: 19). And grateful also to Tilak and Bipin

7. “The knowledge and survey of vice is in this world so necessary to the constituting of human virtue, and the scanning of error to the confirmation of truth” (Milton 1903: 46).
Chandra Pal and Lajput Rai, he also seems to suggest, for “unrest” in general had demonstrated a profound productivity.

Unrest was a form of awakening akin to emerging from sleep, Gandhi elaborates, a liminal phase between the “comatose” state and full consciousness in which “we are still twisting our limbs and still restless.” “The knowledge that there is unrest will, it is highly probable, enable us to outgrow it. Rising from sleep, we do not continue in a comatose state, but, according to our ability, sooner or later, we are completely restored to our senses” (Gandhi 1997: 24).
Figure 9 Paradoxes of nonviolence (2): Gandhi pulling open his chest to reveal his devotion to revolutionary freedom fighters (Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, and Rajguru). The standing figure on the right is the revolutionary B. K. Dutt. Copy print of offset lithograph, ca. 1931. Nehru Memorial Library, New Delhi
The “negatives that cure thirty-six diseases” are situated at the heart of Gandhi’s thought, and a positive self-presence is always much harder to achieve. In *My Experiments with Truth* Gandhi describes the difficulty he faced in coming up with the “new name” for what he admits in Gujarati was denoted by the interpolated English phrase “passive resistance.” He wrote that “[I] could not for the life of me find out a new name” and resorted therefore to announcing a competition in *Indian Opinion* with a nominal prize to the “reader who made the best suggestion on the subject” (Gandhi 2009: 287).

The thwarted self-presence of nonviolence is a central concern of later Gandhian commentary. Nagendranath Gupta, veteran congressman and former editor of the Lahore *Tribune*, argued in *Gandhi and Gandhism* (first published in Bombay in 1945) for the foundational nature of violence: “Violence is the primary instinct of all living creatures, whether brute, bird or human” (Gupta 1948: 103). Gupta paired two chapters, one titled (in almost Girardian terms) “The Divinity of Violence” and the other “The Godliness of Non-violence.” The first of these, concerned with “divinity,” argues that violence is an “animal instinct” that has been “raised to the sanctity of divine commandment” (Gupta 1948: 105). Religion took “primitive instincts” and enshrined them in a conflictual economy of sacrifice. Violence became a “creed” (animals were killed to appease the gods), and its technological amplification “with calm meditation on an organized scale” produced “an unholy sense of exultation” (Gupta 1948: 104, 105). But violence contains its own nemesis: “Modern Europe has worshipped assiduously at the altar of violence until the goddess has turned round and threatens to rend her faithful votaries” (Gupta 1948: 108).

This primitive and foundational “divinity” of violence is counterposed in Gupta’s account to the historical “godliness” of nonviolence. This negation is a learned repudiation of an instinctual violence, something to be acquired through instruction. Its chief teachers are the Buddha, Krishna, Jesus, and, of course, Gandhi, whom Gupta (1948: 126) credits with the development of a “new theory of war,” namely, that “the soul is mightier than all the weapons invented by science.”

I have suggested that *Hind Swaraj*, written against Tilak and his followers, when read deconstructively, reveals an unexpected mirroring and sympathy of apparently opposed positions. But alongside this it is important to underscore an irresolvable difference. Gandhi’s *kaliyugi* ethics of self-discovery remains—despite embodying (as Sumit Sarkar said of Ramakrishna) a childhood rediscovered after adulthood—resolutely antimodern.8 Like John Ruskin’s *Unto This Last* (to which

8. The *kaliyug* that currently prevails is the fourth and most degrading *yug* (epoch).
it owes so much), it is a series of rejections and turnings away from the modern. The modern, metaphorized perhaps most powerfully by the railway with its evil new mechanics of locomotion disrupting the natural “work of the hands and feet,” is characterized by a kaliyugi ephemerality (European civilization is a “nine days’ wonder,” whereas Indian civilization is like the Satyayug, “best” [Gandhi 1997: 116]) and a kaliyugi decay predicated on the commonly made association of that epoch not with Kali the demon but with kal — machinery (an association I still hear very commonly in the central Indian village I regularly visit). For Gandhi, the self-making obligation of swaraj involved this confrontation with the modern, an ethics of expiation and renunciation and a return to slowness. Tilak by contrast was, as Gandhi rightly surmised, infatuated with the potential of a supermodernity avant la lettre. One can see this difference in their attitudes toward printing: Gandhi (1997: 111) has to justify, with the logic of the pharmakon (“sometimes poison is used to kill poison”), his use of machinery to print Hind Swaraj. Tilak was wedded to the disseminatory power of the printing press, which he had learned from Vishnu Krishna Chiplunkar, founder of the Arya-Bhushan and Chitrasala Steam Presses. This technology (i.e., printing) also had, to cite Tilak, “more the form of knowledge.” The Chitrasala Press’s premises, its own official history claims, were where the first bomb in the Deccan was assembled. Four years before the founding of Chitrasala in 1878, Chiplunkar had started an influential literary and political magazine, Nibandha Mala, whose contents exploded, N. C. Kelkar (n.d., 17–18) says, “like a bombshell.”

For both Gandhi and Tilak, as much as for the Euro-Americans considered by Tom Gunning, a scholar of early film, modernity was centrally about “systems of circulation” (Gunning 1995: 16). Drawing on Wolfgang Schivelbusch’s wonderful book The Railway Journey, Gunning draws our attention to the new perceptual economy of speed, fluidity, and embodiment/disembodiment that lies at the heart of the experience we recognize as modernity. Gunning (1995: 16) characterizes this drama of modernity as “a collapsing of previous experiences of space and time through speed; an extension of the power and productivity of the human body; and a consequent transformation of the body through new thresholds of demand and danger.” It was this threshold that repelled Gandhi and enchanted Tilak, despite what for many commentators is (understandably) seen to be the reactionary nature of the latter’s politics (e.g., Rao 2010).
The contrast between Gandhi and Tilak is most clearly seen in their different attitudes toward weaponization. For Gandhi (1997: 77), this necessarily entailed infection by a military-industrial \textit{Zeugganze}: “To arm India on a large scale” in order to defeat British arms, Gandhi argues, would be to “Europeanise it,” with the consequence that India’s condition would become “just as pitiable as that of Europe.” For Tilak, bomb-making technology proffered an escape from this “gigantic machinery,” for unlike arms and muskets, bombs were detached from the \textit{Zeugganze} of the first industrial revolution; they had become amulets, charms, formulas, part of oral lore: a completely portable form of knowledge through which Indians could also liberate their own selves.

Gandhi would die at the hands of Godse. In his trial testimony, shortly before his execution, Godse made a number of observations that counterpoint themes that I have tried to narrate in this article. He argued that “Tilak and Savarkar held identical views” (Godse 1978: 9), pointed to the benefit Gandhi derived from the early death of his opponents (1978: 67), and claimed that narratives that foregrounded Gandhi’s (“negligible”) role in the liberation of India wrote a “false history” (1978: 115, 123). He also noted Gandhi’s willingness to rely on donations from wealthy patrons who willingly supplied materials to the “blood-filled war” (Godse 1978: 132–33).

But at the heart of his testimony, Godse affirms a central argument of \textit{Hind Swaraj}. Some of its language, even, is strangely reminiscent of Gandhi’s: for instance, he twice has recourse to the metaphor of the “vivisection” of “Hindusthan” (Godse 1978: 3, 104). In the first section of his “x-ray” of Gandhi’s politics, Godse narrates the manner in which the Hindu Sabha embraced the potential of the mobilization against the Axis powers during World War II: “This was an opportunity for our young men to have a military training.” This opportunity had previously been denied to them by an anxious colonial state, but “due to this war the Army, Navy and Air-force were opened to us and [the Hindu] Mahasabha urged our countrymen to militarise Hindus,” with the result, Godse continues, that “nearly 1/2 millions of Hindus learnt the art of war and mastered the m[e]chanised aspect of modern warfare” (Godse 1978: 71).

Ten days before Gandhi’s death, Godse and his fellow conspirators were responsible for an explosion — created by a bomb made from gun-cotton slab — which damaged the wall of Birla House in Delhi (Godse 1978: 3), but Gandhi would die as the result of a bullet fired from a Beretta M1934 semiautomatic pistol, the product of one of Europe’s oldest corporations.\footnote{It was founded in Lombardy in 1526.} These two techne echo the choices...
Figure 10  Execution of Nathuram Godse and Madanlal Apte. Artist and publisher unknown, ca. 1948. Private collection
that I have explored in this article: a vernacular practice of violence—detached from the colonial Zeugganze—and violence predicated on the gigantic machinery of “musket and gun” production. It was the latter that, in the end, destroyed the Mahatma. Gandhi, it seems, as Godse’s own testimony appears to demonstrate, had been correct. Godse’s “militarise[d] Hindus” had become, in Gandhi’s words (1997: 77), “splendidly armed” in the European fashion. “Master[ing] the art of the m[e]chanised aspect of modern warfare” (Godse 1978: 71), Godse had become “well-trained” (Gandhi 1997: 77). Perhaps some sense of this entrapment is captured by the rueful prison employee in a popular image recording the hanging of Godse and Madanlal Apte (fig. 10). Depicted at bottom right, the warden looks mournfully upon the scene, holding chains in his right hand. These may be the literal chains removed from Godse and Apte before they mounted the dead drop, but also metaphorical chains released by a liberated Mother India, which leaves the viewer with multiple questions. Is India really “free” if it hangs its new freedom fighters in the manner of the colonial state? Independent India still synchronizes its acts of retribution, as the watch-peering figure of authority on the left demonstrates. And what cost freedom—the chains also seem to signify—if it returns to India “Europeanised” killers like Godse and Apte? Clutching his Beretta, and having become “as pitiable as” Europe, Godse no longer “tremble[d] to think of freeing India by assassination” (Gandhi 1997: 77): he too imagined he could have the tiger’s nature without the tiger.

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