

# Homosexuality and nonviolence, crisis and rebirth of a culture of rights

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Studying the psychological and ethical relationship between homosexuality and nonviolence seems a very fruitful exercise in order to allow human diversity to increase its constructive and enriching overall value. It is an exercise in which individuals and the collectivity, the personal sphere and social dimension, interact and hybridize each other with far reaching potentialities.

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From a psychological point of view, and following my general approach in analyzing Mahatma's nonviolence using Swiss psychologist C.G. Jung's analytical psychology, the starting point is that to understand nonviolence, means understanding its link to an inner transformative path, as Gandhi's teachings clearly indicate. Jung's psychology seems particularly useful in helping one comprehend such a process, also considering the Swiss psychologist's interest in oriental traditional thought.

Primarily, it is the focus on interaction between interiority and exteriority that links Gandhi's nonviolence to the ethical core of Jungian's psychology and to James Hillman's archetypal psychology, with its famous concept of an *Anima Mundi* demanding an overall ethical responsibility for a psychological vision of the world. But they are also connected in the perspective of a global intercultural dialogue. Although it is always complex to use the categories "East" and "West", it is a fact that, on the one hand, Gandhi was influenced by western thinkers – from Shelley to Thoreau – in his rediscovery of the values of his own nonviolent traditions. And, on the other, that Jung received much-needed theoretical support for his psychological thesis from Taoism, Buddhism and Hinduism.

Against this multiple backdrop, what emerges as central both for Gandhi and Jung is the utmost relevance of the 'Other'. A fundamental point when analyzing psychological relations between homosexuality and nonviolence, since it is a perspective that concerns the inner realm of human beings as the place of the processing of an individual relationship with the social context. If this is one of Jung's most important theoretical contributions to the relationship between human beings and society, it is a point that is still a source of misunderstanding. There is, in fact, persisting confusion between what is commonly perceived as a self-encapsulation – the inner path of self-analysis – and the value of such an experience for the person involved, since for him/her that is the way to establish a solid and constructive link with the world.

Observing homosexuality from this perspective and, more generally, LGTBI's dimension (LGTBI is the international acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, Bisexual and Intersex), one realizes that this dimension provides a very fertile field in the direction of giving the right social value to the relationship with one's own interiority. It is certain, in fact, that homosexuals are asked to establish a conscious relation with their own interiority in a way that is far more peremptory than what is usual for others.

The path to understanding and accepting their nature is a vital necessity for homosexuals, a necessity all the more complex since initially they see themselves as bearers of a "diversity" compared to what is socially considered the norm, a norm usually unconsciously interiorized. It is a condition that initially obliges homosexuals to ask themselves questions about themselves, questions that heterosexuals do not need to address. It is certain that recent noteworthy civic advancements in western societies – but also in others, such as Latin America – are very helpful to young homosexual

generations, making it easier for them to process their natural inner development. Nevertheless, much still remains to be done - even in countries with the most advanced legislations - since homophobia, discrimination and oppression of all sorts are always there as a reminder. In any case, the inner paths of acceptance are never without quite significant levels of suffering, and their full positive outcome, although natural in principle, can never be taken for granted.

Within this framework there is the first noteworthy connection between homosexuality and nonviolence, a point that I call “internal subjective”. It means the reevaluation of the inner path of acceptance, which homosexuals deciding to fully experience their sexuality ought to develop. It is out of any question, in fact, that such a path fosters a special sensitivity regarding nonviolence, in the first place in its meaning of openness to the ‘Other’, since homosexuals must accept and integrate something that is initially perceived as a form of inner otherness.

Obviously, this does not mean that a homosexual is as such a nonviolent person, since nonviolence, unlike homosexuality, is not a natural state but an ethical choice. What I am arguing, instead, is that there is a *potentiality* to understand the reasons of the other as well as a sensitivity for what is implied in enduring suffering. A potentiality that also includes the capacity – that any human being who has experienced suffering possesses - to transform that same suffering into a positive and constructive ethical value.

This line of thought introduces the second point of psychological contact between homosexuality and nonviolence. It is a point that I define the “internal objective”. It is important here to recall the essence of nonviolence: the capacity to arise in the soul of the “enemy” – of the Other –, by suffering without reciprocating violence, to doubt in order to create the possibility of change in his or her attitude. To clear a new path, a path to be travelled – and created – jointly with the “enemy”. As may be clear, the overall system relies on the assumption that the human soul harbors the possibility to be moved, to be emotionally affected by the other’s nobility of the soul.

Here one can touch upon the real core of the “internal objective’s” dimension. I am referring to care – a sort of innate moral impulse – for our personal growth. Care that, as Gandhi always underlined, is indispensable for those who choose the path of nonviolence. A vision that it is also at the heart of Jungian psychology, which revolves around the “process of individuation”. In Jung’s opinion, it is paramount to attribute the right importance to the “inner man”, who is constantly recreating himself, but whose development, according to the Swiss psychologist, risks to be far too unconscious in our times than what is needed to face the challenges posed by new technologies and scientific developments. To give humanity the capacity to properly use such increased power with an analogously increased spiritual strength, is what in India is called “Civilizational Gandhi”.

The “internal objective” dimension, speaking as it does of sensitivity, openness and ultimately tolerance, takes us to the heart of today’s challenges, and its social and even political importance should not be underestimated. Today we live in a world where people are constantly called upon to live “out of themselves”. A world where there is never time to establish true contact with our own interiority, something that, on the contrary, should instead be all the more necessary. It is a well-known fact that all that we do not know about ourselves is experienced by us by projecting it onto others. Unfortunately, all that we do not learn about ourselves are often the most difficult things to accept, inevitably projected onto others, creating a terrible vicious circle of fear, recrimination and retaliation, both at individual and collective levels. This is an outcome that both Freud and Jung, as well as many other psychoanalysts, have always warned about.

For all these psychological reasons, homosexuals’ inner richness may play a very important role in today’s world. It incarnates the archetypal paradigm of an arising of consciousness through a constructive relationship with one’s own interiority. The conscious effort to get to know and accept oneself made by homosexual people, guarantees the existence of a legacy of sensitivity for suffering within the society. If it is true that in the course of life everybody should make the effort to learn how

to deal with his or her own interiority, homosexuals are nevertheless certainly asked to make such an effort. Their nature has placed them in a position that compels them to establish such a relationship. As I have already said, this fact does not automatically have the effect of a person becoming nonviolent, since nonviolence remains an ethical choice of life. Such a choice is, however, favored where life itself has given a person the opportunity to build an inner wealth of sensitivity to suffering. The point is the will to use such a legacy in a constructive manner.

Coming to the ethical element, I believe that LGTBI persons should not limit themselves to demands for sexual and affective legal freedom and equality, albeit sacrosanct and still completely lacking in so many parts of the world, but also strive to turn their sensitivity and tolerance, acquired in their inner path of acceptance, into a social and political value for the whole of society. For a homosexual, embracing nonviolence represents the most logical step towards adopting a social attitude of broader constructive responsibility. When seen in their socio-political light, both the subjective and the objective psychological dimensions bring us very close to Gandhi's ethical vision of placing obligations before rights, advocated in the West also by Simone Weil.

Therefore, analyzing the links between homosexuality and nonviolence also means analyzing in greater depth the evolution of human rights. In fact, on the one hand, since the days in which Gandhi used nonviolence to help minorities – firstly the untouchables - nonviolence and human rights have begun to interact in a beneficial manner. On the other hand, observing the progress of democratic practices based on human rights, the social legacy of sensitivity of LGTBI persons acquires far greater importance. Seen from a human rights' point of view, in fact, the LGTBI question represents both the new frontline on the path towards freedom and equality, the roots of which lie in Enlightenment - the illuminist project – as well as a new element in the evolution and advancement of the same illuminist project.

In other words, the relationship between homosexuality and nonviolence can also be viewed as part of the “Progress of Sentiment” advocated by the American pragmatist philosopher Rorty. A renovation of the illuminist project through the valorization of sentiments, affectivity and the human factor in general. It is an element that can help not only overcome the excesses the illuminist project has experienced especially during last century, but also to seize the most cogent aspects of our times. I am referring to the fact that we have entered a “culture of Human Rights” – a definition provided by the Argentinian philosopher Rabossi – which started its ascent after World War II with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and that today is becoming a global reality.

In this overall vision, the social legacy of the sensitivity of the homosexual dimension speaks of a greater humanization of the pathway of ideas and rights, of equality and freedom, started with the Enlightenment. Seen in the light of its connection to nonviolence, it becomes a legacy of political importance as well, since it may substantially help the growth of a new “culture of human rights”. Looking at what thinkers like the French Condorcet or the Italian Beccaria - whose famous work *On Crimes and Punishments* helped abolish torture and death penalty in so many countries - were able to envisage over two centuries ago as far as the dignity of human beings is concerned, reinforcing the nexus between human rights and nonviolence seems a fundamental choice for our times. It is a choice that LGTBI persons may greatly help understand and achieve.

Focusing today on the links between homosexuality and nonviolence involves deeply rooted meanings and potentialities. Above all, a renewal and reinforcement of the illuminist project, correcting, broadening and regenerating the scope and vision of the men and women of those times, by combining such scope and vision with the Mahatma's message in a truly contemporary spirit of global intercultural dialogue and universally sustainable human rights.

