The Illusion of an Abundant End- A Phenomenological Approach to Sustainability: The Progress Trap and The Transformative Potential Of Dialogue

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THE ILLUSION OF AN ABUNDANT END – A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO SUSTAINABILITY: THE PROGRESS TRAP AND THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF DIALOGUE

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THE ILLUSION OF AN ABUNDANT END - A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO SUSTAINABILITY: THE PROGRESS TRAP AND THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF DIALOGUE

by

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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments .................................................................................................................. iv

Table of Contents .................................................................................................................. v

List of Figures ......................................................................................................................... vi

The Abundant End ................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter I: The Way We See It ............................................................................................... 2

  Instances of Realization ....................................................................................................... 5

  Early Responses .................................................................................................................. 7

  Assessment & Criticism ....................................................................................................... 12

  Conclusion ......................................................................................................................... 22

Chapter 2: Homogenization ................................................................................................. 25

  Pan-Parallel: What Is Perspective? .................................................................................... 26

  Into The Self ...................................................................................................................... 30

  Rails and Relevance .......................................................................................................... 39

  Pre Independence Situation ............................................................................................. 43

  Post-Independence Situation ............................................................................................ 50

  Conclusion ......................................................................................................................... 68

Chapter 3: Dialogue ............................................................................................................. 71

  Conclusion ......................................................................................................................... 80

Work Cited ............................................................................................................................ 86

Vita .......................................................................................................................................... 91
# List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>The three circles of sustainability</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>Teacher convincing a kid to stay in the system</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>Illustration of homogenization</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td>Image representing the first stanza of the poem</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5</td>
<td>Image representing the second stanza of the poem</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6</td>
<td>Image representing the last stanza of the poem</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7</td>
<td>Setting a goal</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8</td>
<td>The completion of a goal</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 9</td>
<td>Diya and its analogy</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 10</td>
<td>Endlessness of progress</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 11</td>
<td>Resigned passengers</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 12</td>
<td>Pollution and the clarity of vision on the high rise</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Abundant End

Abundance is a concept according to which a thing is deemed to be in plenty. The feeling of satisfaction and assurance, arising from something that is concretely abundant, serves as a material reason for motivation of a desired action. Just like the stock of food lying in our fridge, ensuring more than just the needs of the moment, the abundance cooks the taste of freedom, freedom from worrying about tomorrow. However, over consumption out of greed as a potential outcome of abundance, could result in the increased capacity of a person in order to reach the initial level of satisfaction. This results in abundance becoming merely a conceptual act of understanding, not just by coming to an end at a faster rate due to excessive intake but also because of how adverse ends are also simultaneously produced; for e.g. throwing up as a result of misunderstood capacity.

It is just as hard to understand the capacity as it is to understand the abundance since both excess of capacity and excess of intake are unsustainable in their own ways. This brings attention to ‘what is sustainable’ and how to best understand satisfaction in terms of the needs of the present and the future while also acknowledging the presence of others and maintaining inclusivity. Although the solutions offered so far to such an issue tend to slip in the direction of finding a best digestion medicine or to spend billions of dollars in the attempt to colonize Mars or any other planet after the earth, in this paper I intend to discuss how such solutions fall into what is called as the progress trap, understood in terms of sustainability.
Chapter I: The Way We See It

Sustainability in the current times is one of the primary concerns of the world. Ever since it caught worldwide attention, sustainability has been defined with more and more basic concerns which encompasses not only environmental well-being but extends to the root level of the individuals. This was well stated in the first step taken towards the implementation of sustainable development with the formulation of “Our Common Future,” also known as the Brundtland Report. This document resulted from the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) which was published in 1987. The intention of the WCED was to lay the foundation for international multilateralism while allowing independent nation-states to make their own way in ‘developing’ a sustainable path. One of its most important contributions to the history of sustainability is how it ‘joined’ environmentalism with economic development:

“When the terms of reference of our Commission were originally being discussed in 1982, there were those who wanted its considerations to be limited to "environmental issues" only. This would have been a grave mistake. The environment does not exist as a sphere separate from human actions, ambitions, and needs and attempts to defend it in isolation from human concerns have given the very word "environment" a connotation of naivety in some political circles. The word "development" has also been narrowed by some into a very limited focus, along the lines of "what poor nations should do to become richer", and thus again is automatically dismissed by many in the international arena as being a concern of specialists, of those involved in questions of "development assistance". But the "environment" is where we all live; and "development" is what we all do in attempting to improve our lot within that abode. The two are inseparable.” (WCED, 1987, p. 13)

The fact that environment as not separate from human economic development however, has a long course of history before its acceptance on the global level and the way we see it today. To explore the concerns such as abundance and individual capacity in the light of ambition and
needs, as I will do in this chapter, it is necessary to present a timeline of some of the most relevant fundamental events that humanity has encountered on the face of the earth and how they relate to the history of sustainability. However as that history unfolds, it will be apparent that efforts made to gain from nature perpetuated from the idea of abundance and unlimited has always slid to the level of over exploitation, to which the nature’s reaction has been elusively unfavourable.

1) ANCIENT SUMER: One of the oldest civilizations as suggested by archaeological evidence arose in Sumer (now Iraq) and Egypt. Both dating around 3000 BCE, Sumer particularly illustrates characters concerned with sustainability. Sumerian cities engaged in intensive agriculture during 5300 BCE which created surplus of storable food that promoted increased population density. It was beneficial to settle in one place instead of migrating like nomads in search of wild foods and grazing lands. As a result of increased demands, the building and maintenance of irrigation required many labours which led to the hierarchies in terms of distributed responsibilities. However more and more clearance of forest lands led to deforestation (elusively unfavourable phenomenon) causing floods which increased the soil salinity. Eventually decrease in agriculture produce and other factors led to the decline of civilization at the rate of 60 percent of population reduction by 1700 BC.

2) EASTERN ISLANDS: One of the most peculiar societal collapses of early civilizations was in the case of Eastern islands locally known as Rapa Nui. Famous for its World
Heritage Site ‘Moai’ which are the statues erected along the island perimeter. Each of the statues weighing 13.8 tons on an average to even 82 tons, were symbols of authority and power, both religious and political and were believed to be charged by a magical spiritual essence called mana. Despite of the presence of such a powerful authority on their side what led to their demise was the very statues! In order to move these heavy structures the only method which majority of archaeologists can agree to is by using felled trees as rollers to carry them to the coastline. Because Easter Island's geographic isolation made its resources hard to replenish and made the balance of its overall ecosystem very delicate, deforestation led to soil erosion and insufficient resources to build boats for fishing or tools for hunting. Competition for scarce resources resulted in warfare which eventually led to the collapse of the civilization.

3) INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION: The event that marked the beginning of modern globalization was the industrial revolution that emerged in Great Britain in late 17th century. It was a transition in the manufacturing processes that increased efficiency in terms of production which was achieved by machines instead of hand crafting that gave rise to factory systems instead of home production. The optimists¹ of the industrial revolution hold that the standard of living for the general population began to increase consistently for the first time in history. Consequently it is argued that it led to massive migration from rural areas to these urban centres. While there were many factors conducive, one of the most important factors that made the revolution possible was the technological innovations, out of which, steam engine being the one which literally

powered the factories. Since the engine ran on coal it caused increased levels of smoke pollution resulting from over consumption of the fossil fuel. This, together with the large volumes untreated industrial chemical discharge led to the advent of environmental concerns as a result of which the first large-scale, modern environmental laws came in the form of Britain's Alkali Acts\(^2\) passed in 1863, to regulate the deleterious air pollution.

**Instances of Realization**

As a result of industrialization, air pollution was one of the first impacts that affected people on a regional level that marked the beginning of the realization of the costs associated with such a progress. This led to the development of altogether new concerns in twentieth century such as conservation, availability, efficiency etc. Since it became clear that the rate of consumption increased throughout the world as an obvious outcome of mass migration to the cities, the awareness of the limited availability slowly gained concern. Following are some examples of environmental concerns:

1) The first modern conservation movement appeared in the forests of India\(^3\), with the practical application of scientific conservation principles. The conservation ethics included three core principles: the human activity damaged the environment, that there needs to be a civic duty to maintain the environment for future generations and scientific, empirically based methods should be applied to ensure this duty was carried out.

The Madras Board of Revenue in British India started local conservation efforts in 1842, which systematically adopted a forest conservation program based on scientific


principles. This eventually led the British government in India to introduce the first permanent and large-scale forest conservation program in the world in 1855, a model that soon spread to other colonies, as well the United States.

2) In the 20th century, environmental ideas continued to grow in popularity and recognition. Founders of the movement called for more efficient and professional management of natural resources. They fought for reform because they believed the destruction of forests, fertile soil, minerals and wildlife and water resources would lead to the downfall of society. The 26th President of the US, Theodore Roosevelt (4 October 1907), quoted that “conservation of natural resources is the fundamental problem. Unless we solve that problem, it will avail us little to solve all others.” Under his Presidency Roosevelt enacted a series of conservation programs such as establishing the United States Forest Service, the first 51 bird reserves, four game preserves, and 150 National Forests.

3) In Britain, systematic and general efforts on behalf of the environment only began in the late 19th century as a reaction to industrialization, the growth of cities, and worsening air and water pollution. A "Back-to-Nature“ movement was started by intellectuals such as John Ruskin, William Morris, and Edward Carpenter, who were all against pollution, consumerism and other activities that were harmful to the natural world. The following quote suggests that the movement was a reaction to the urban conditions of the industrial towns, where sanitation was awful, pollution levels intolerable and housing terribly cramped. John Ruskin argued that, “people should return to a small piece of English ground, beautiful, peaceful, and fruitful. We will have no steam

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4 Address of the President Roosevelt to Deep Waterway Convention at Memphis, Tennessee, October 4, 1907: p.44
engines upon it . . . we will have plenty of flowers and vegetables . . . we will have some
music and poetry; the children will learn to dance to it and sing it” (Jones, 1874)

Early Responses

With the increased awareness of the limits of the available resources, came the era of efficiency
and conservation⁶. The Efficiency movement began as a major movement in the United States,
Britain and other industrial nations in the early 20th century. It sought to identify and eliminate
waste in different aspects of the economy and society in order to develop and implement best
practices.

1) ECONOMICS: The economists focused on developing models of non-renewable
resource management and welfare of the economy that uses non-renewable resources.
This conservation movement was concerned about the possible overexploitation of non-
renewable natural resources and called for regulation. In 1931 Harold
Hotelling responded to this call with his paper in which he began by stating:

“Contemplation of the world’s disappearing supplies of minerals, forests, and other
exhaustible assets had led to demands for regulation of their exploitation. The feeling that
these products are now too cheap for the good of future generations, that they are being
selfishly exploited at too rapid a rate, and that in consequence of their excessive
cheapness they are being produced and consumed wastefully has given rise to the
conservation movement⁷.”

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⁶ Samuel P. Hays, in his book Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency understands conservation as a ‘scientific
movement’ and its concern arose from implication of science and technology in modern society. He writes, “Its
essence was rational planning to promote efficient development and use of all natural resources.” (Hays, S.H.
Amsterdam: Elsevier p. 857
**Hotelling's rule**\(^8\) states that the most socially and economically profitable extraction path of a non-renewable resource is one along which the price of the resource, determined by the marginal net revenue from the sale of the resource, increases at the rate of interest. It describes the time path of natural resource extraction which maximizes the value of the resource stock. In its simplest sense and within the context of conservation, it implies that indeed it is both profitable for the owner of the resource and ideal to maintain its consumption rate due to ensure its longer availability.

2) **TECHNOLOGY:** Innovations to counter the scarcity of resources and exploit maximum from what is available took various forms however the one that reaches the standards for being called an epitome is the solar energy. Efforts to design and construct devices for supplying renewable energy actually began at the very height of the Industrial Revolution, which was largely founded on the promise of seemingly inexhaustible supplies of fossil fuels\(^9\). Although the first photovoltaic effect was observed in 1839\(^10\) which went through a considerable development in its design, it was only after the Oil Embargo of 1973 that pushed the federal government of the US to push the Research and Development in renewable energy\(^11\).

3) **POLITICS:** Globalization in its modern form became apparent as a direct result of industrialization. The world by the mid-20\(^{th}\) century was growing more and more

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interdependent to continue maintain the lifestyle. For instance petroleum is one such commodity that made most of the developed nations such as the US, Germany and Canada rely on the Middle East countries to supply their demands. By 1973, most of these developed nations reached their peak for Oil Production as a result of which the Oil rich countries gained monopoly and leverage to increase the prices abnormally in order to reach political ends. President Jimmy Carter makes a famous speech on energy, detailing how the US is facing an imminent energy shortage and arguing that the country must make profound changes in the way it uses energy. The following is an excerpt from the speech\textsuperscript{12}:

"Tonight I want to have an unpleasant talk with you about a problem unprecedented in our history. With the exception of preventing war, this is the greatest challenge our country will face during our lifetimes. The energy crisis has not yet overwhelmed us, but it will if we do not act quickly...

This difficult effort will be the 'moral equivalent of war'...

The oil and natural gas we rely on for 75 percent of our energy are running out. In spite of increased effort, domestic production has been dropping steadily at about six percent a year. Imports have doubled in the last five years. Our nation's independence of economic and political action is becoming increasingly constrained. Unless profound changes are made to lower oil consumption, we now believe that early in the 1980s the world will be demanding more oil than it can produce...

Because we are now running out of gas and oil, we must prepare quickly for a third change, to strict conservation and to the use of coal and permanent renewable energy sources, like solar power...

If we fail to act soon, we will face an economic, social and political crisis that will threaten our free institutions."

Environmentalism reached new heights during the crisis, and became a motivating force behind policymaking. Various acts of legislation during the 1970s sought to redefine America’s relationship to fossil fuels and other sources of energy from the Emergency Petroleum Allocation Act (passed by Congress in November 1973, at the height of the oil panic) to the establishment of the Energy Research and Development Administration (ERDA) in 1975 and the Department of Energy (DOE) in 1977\(^\text{13}\).

Finally one of the pivotal steps taken on the global level in response to the ongoing trends of the world’s progress and development was the Brundtland report in October 1987. Also known as ‘Our common future’, the mission of the report was to unite countries to pursue sustainable development together. It was intended as a response to the conflict between globalized economic growth and the ecological degradation occurring on a global scale. The challenge posed in the 1980s was to harmonize prosperity with ecology. Hence the task was to find a means to continue economic growth without undue harm to the environment. To address the urgent needs of developing countries, the United Nations saw a need to strike a better balance of human and environmental well-being. This was to be achieved by redefining the concepts of "economic development" as the new idea of "sustainable development" - as it was called in the Brundtland Report.

The report deals with sustainable development and the change of politics needed for achieving it. The definition of this term in the report is quite well known and often cited:

"Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". It contains two key concepts:

• The concept of "needs", in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and
• The idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment’s ability to meet present and future needs."

— World Commission on Environment and Development, Our Common Future (1987)

One of the most commonly identified and widely accepted idea of sustainable development is described in terms of the three spheres/pillars i.e. Environment, Economy and society. Sustainability consists in achieving equilibrium between these interdependent spheres. To strike relevance among the three spheres following is the brief account presenting their mutual dependence:

**Economy:** Economic Growth is the pillar that most groups focus on when attempting to attain more sustainable efforts and development. In trying to build their economies, many countries focus their efforts on resource extraction, which leads to unsustainable efforts for environmental protection as well as economic growth sustainability.

**Environment:** Environmental sustainability concerns the natural environment and how it endures and remains diverse and productive. Since natural resources are derived from the environment, the state of air, water, and the climate are of particular concern. An unsustainable situation occurs when natural capital (the sum total of nature's resources) is used up faster than it can be replenished.
Sustainability requires that human activity only uses nature’s resources at a rate at which they can be replenished naturally. Hence to avoid over consumption and maintain the ecological balance, the technological developments are being made to adopt the renewable sources of energy.

**Society:** The Social Equality and Equity as pillars of sustainable development focus on the social well-being of people. The growing gap between incomes of rich and poor is evident throughout the world with the incomes of the richer households increasing relative to the incomes of middle - or lower-class households. This is attributed partly to the land distribution patterns in rural areas where majority live from land. Global inequality has been declining, but the world is still extremely unequal, with the richest of the world’s population owning most of the world’s wealth.

**Assessment & Criticism**

“At the start of 2015, Oxfam had warned that 1% of the world’s population would own more wealth than the other 99% by next year. Mark Goldring, Oxfam GB’s chief executive, said: “The fact it has happened a year early – just weeks after world leaders agreed a global goal to reduce inequality – shows just how urgently world leaders need to tackle this problem.”

Gravity of the above information grows if one acknowledges the fact that 30 years have passed since the first step was taken to counter the unsustainable human acts. The Brundtland report famously defined sustainable development as: "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” To begin analysing the progress made to achieve the standards which are reflected in this definition, it is necessary to understand the four primary dimensions that

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have been derived from the Brundtland Report: safeguarding long-term ecological sustainability, satisfying basic human needs, and promoting intra generational and intergenerational equity. The categorization of the Brundtland Report in these aspects is given by Erling Holden in his book Achieving Sustainable Mobility: Every day and Leisure-time travel in the EU.

1) **Safeguarding long term ecological sustainability**: “The term “sustainability” has its origin in ecological science. It was developed to express the conditions that must be present for the ecosystem to sustain itself over the long term. In the Brundtland Report, there are several references to the necessity of ecological sustainability, such as: “At a minimum, sustainable development must not endanger the natural systems that support life on Earth: the atmosphere, the waters, the soils, and the living beings” (WCED, 1987, p. 44). Since human development tends to damage ecosystems, earth’s natural base must be conserved if basic human needs are to be met on a sustainable basis.” (Holden, 2016)

2) **Satisfying basic human needs**: The definition of the sustainable development makes it clear that the concept of ‘needs’ is inherent in it. The Brundtland Report mentions employment, food, energy, housing, water supply, sanitation, and health care as basic human needs. It does not, however, refer only to basic needs. Erling holds that according to the report, people are also entitled to aspire to more than just covering their basic needs: “Sustainable development requires meeting the basic needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to satisfy their aspirations for a better life” (WCED, 1987, p. 44) However, if considering the above point of ecological sustainability it can be argued that the living standards that provide for more than basic needs can be sustainable only if such living standards assure long-term ecological sustainability. Thus, not every aspiration for a better life is compatible with the goal of sustainable development.
3) **Inter and intra-generational equity**: “But many problems of resource depletion and environmental stress arise from disparities in economic and political power. An industry may get away with unacceptable levels of air and water pollution because the people who bear the brunt of it are poor and unable to complain effectively.” (WCED, 1987, p.44). The report puts forth many situations where social inequity promotes unsustainable behaviour because each segment of the society is affected differently. Hence common interest in sustainable development cannot be secured unless development policies pay attention to considerations such as changes in access to resources and in the distribution of costs and burdens. This also extends to the social equity between the generations as per the definition of the sustainable development.

For each of the four primary dimensions, there are appropriate indicators and threshold values that need to be met for development to be deemed sustainable. Although the UN uses almost hundreds of indicators to measure different aspects which are frequently discovered, here we shall discuss in brief the four of them to cover the four dimensions.

1) **Ecological footprint**: An indicator for safeguarding long-term ecological sustainability. “The ecological footprint tracks humanity’s demands on the biosphere by comparing humanity’s consumption against the Earth’s regenerative capacity, or biocapacity. This comparison is carried out through calculating the area, measured in global hectares, required to produce the resources people consume, the area occupied by infrastructure, and the area of forest required for sequestering CO2 not absorbed by the ocean. It illustrates the extent to which we may be overusing natural resources.” (Holden, 2016)

2) **Human Development Index**: It is used to measure a country’s overall achievement in its social and economic dimensions. The social and economic dimensions of a country are
based on the health of people, their level of education attainment and their standard of living. Calculation of the index combines four major indicators: life expectancy for health, expected years of schooling, mean of years of schooling for education and Gross National Income per capita for standard of living (UNDP, 2011).

3) **Gini Coefficient:** Gini coefficient as an indicator of intragenerational equity is the most popular and widely used measure of inequality. It measures the inequality among values of a frequency distribution in a country (for example, levels of income). A Gini coefficient of zero expresses perfect equality (for example, where everyone has an exactly equal income) whereas a Gini coefficient of one hundred expresses maximal inequality (for example, where one person has all the income).

4) **Proportion of renewable energy to total primary energy production:** This is used as an indicator of intergenerational equity. Intergenerational equity requires that future generations be able to meet their needs. Since it is likely that the fossil fuels will become scarce, the Brundtland Report emphasizes that “every effort should be made to develop the potential for renewable energy, which should form the foundation of the global energy structure during the 21st Century” (WCED, 1987, p. 144). Thus, it explicitly reflects a necessary long-term transition into a renewable-energy regime.

Such indicators help statisticians and data analysts to discover various interdependencies of nature and humans which then serves as a basis to implement decisions by the UN. As of March 2019, there are 232 sustainability indicators listed by the UN to achieve the target of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development (UN DESA, 2019). However, despite of having a great gamut of tools and techniques to measure and assess the relations between the 3 spheres of
sustainability the results are still unfavourable (considering the Oxfam’s report of inequality in 2015). At the same time it would be wrong to conclude that the situation hasn’t improved but if this is the only way to rectify the deeds of our past then there needs to be more to this approach. As Tom Russ mentions in his book Sustainability and Design Ethics “Since few activities, perhaps especially the activities of modern human, are without impacts it becomes critical to begin to manage the impacts and to create designs that account for them (Russ, 2010, p. 108)

On 8 November, few days after the election of Barack Obama to the U.S. Presidency, IBM Chairman and CEO Sam Palmisano presented his narrative of smart innovation in a fifteen minute speech at the U.S. Council of Foreign Affairs (Palmisano, 2008). In his talk, the planet as a whole was described as a single, highly complex and interconnected socio-technical system, running at a high and increasing speed and demanding more and more energy and resources; climate, energy, food and water needed to be efficiently managed in order to meet the challenges of the growing population and a globally integrated economy (Benessia and Funtowicz, 2015, p. 339) A number of sudden and unexpected wake up calls such as the crisis in the financial market had to be recognized as the signs of a discontinuity that needs to be governed. The leaders of both public and private institutions had to acknowledge this radical change and seize the opportunity offered by technoscientific innovation to “change the way in which the world works” (Palmisano, 2008)

In response to the Russ’s concern of accountability, the above quote from Alice Benessia and Silvio Funtowicz paper titled “Sustainability and techno-science: What do we want to sustain and for whom?” seems to offer a solution. However, if such a system is readily agreed upon following are few underlying assumptions that need to be considered too:

1) First, it must be accepted that the inherent complexity of the interaction between socio-ecological and technological systems can be reduced to a measurable set of simplified structured information (Benessia et al., 2016, p. 102).

2) Second, the required ‘facts’ have to be equated with supposedly relevant data, filtered through the appropriate information technologies (Benessia et al., 2016, p. 102).
3) The quality of the decision making processes must be completely independent of the normative sphere of values – a move which requires sufficient computational power to distinguish data from noise and to assign them a meaning that can transform into an operationalized notion of knowledge (Benessia et al., 2016, p. 102).

All the above points suggest that the intricacies of the nature including humans will be measured by a computer which understands anything and everything better than humans themselves. One of the biggest regions of doubt is expressed in 3) where such computation has to be independent of normative sphere of values since no matter how advanced the Artificial Intelligence can get, it will never be able to measure human emotions and spontaneity in a sufficient way. It may evaluate a person’s nature based on his past decisions or at best can make suggestions on that basis but can never account for impulsiveness. Ravetz points out,

“If we fully embrace the technological upgrade and agree to delegate the management of the mundane processes of our lives to connected machines, then we are acquiescing to the idea that we should live in a world of happiness, in which we are never late, never lost and, most of all, never unprepared. This world would be a place in which every minute of our lives would need to be virtually controlled and functionally oriented. In other words we cannot be late, lost or unprepared. It is a world, therefore, in which our relationship with the unknown is tacitly eliminated. This form of technological eradication of uncertainty entails renouncing one of the fundamental sources of human creativity and learning: our capacity to adapt to complexity and the unexpected (Benessia et al, 2016, p. 105).

Consequently, it results in one of the most inevitable drawbacks of using such a technology as assistance i.e. its propensity of homogenizing. Since any kind of machine learning primarily works on mapping and interpreting the recurring patterns, it is bound to make decisions on the principle of probability. This leads to marginalization of the data that is outstanding or is currently beyond the cognitive range of the computation power to form a pattern which is inclusive of all. Assuming that it’s a common practice to use data analytics tools to understand market trends today, consider the following example: the phone companies that are already in the
market but which, however, are not so popular (Windows based phones) eventually are of no use anymore because all the new software updates for the current apps are based on the popular models (IOS/Android based phones). This is justified for the app companies because it would be a loss of resources and time to invest in the dying market. However, what that also leads to is that it results in the homogenization of the market and the subsequent loss of variety.

This shows how a technology which boasts of accountability can also lead to marginalization due to its inherent ways of functioning. In order to create one perfect system, the system whose standards are pre decided, it fails to understand and work efficiently on the loose ends to make them strong again. For example there would not be any efforts made to keep the market alive for the existing users. Hence, since it doesn’t consider the possibility of any impulsive investor to revive the market, it doesn’t make it any easy also for such impulsivity to occur. Moreover, the existing user is forced to join the popular market because now it’s more of a necessity rather than a choice. This is the process of homogenization which shall be discussed and elaborated on in the next chapter. Although the above example provides a critique of technology, the underlying ideas are not so different and are often replicated in the non-digital world. The Global Sustainable development report 2016 begins with the chapter “Ensuring that no one is left behind and the 2030 Agenda”(UN DESA, 2016) and presents several strategies to reduce inequality however, even if all the tools of sustainability help figure out the best possible action, the problem of accountability still remains. Consider this example from the book Just sustainabilities by Agyeman:

“As a geography teacher in the UK in the early 1980’s, I was confronted by a student of mine called David, who said: ‘Sir, what do thickies [dumb kids] like me do now we’ve finished our exams?’ Nothing in my education has prepared me for this. David was not dumb. He was an
average kid who felt he had failed himself and us, his teachers. He hadn’t. We’d failed him in our inability to help him flourish and find out what he was good at.” (Agyeman, 2013, p. 6)

The 2016 report mentions about several sustainability indicators that have been improvised over time to efficiently identify those who are left behind. However in order for this to work in the first place there needs to be a comparison made to what is defined as best for that particular area or region or the country. Here, the problem of accountability emerges in terms of common interest since what is regarded as best is highly subjective. Agyeman realizes that this loss of human potential is unsustainable if the path he is following is designed for the well-being of all.

This shows the unfriendliness of the system towards the diversity and loss of freedom for ones who cannot identify their goals with the majority.

Furthermore, in the case of David it also led to self-devaluation since he has already lost track of his interests and yet to catch up with that of his system’s. Perhaps the image gives a decent illustration.

There are also situations when one abides by the system either to avoid being left behind or in the hope of getting back to their interests once the work is done. The potential impacts of the latter are quite clear in the case of David. In reference to the above picture, it seems the kid would prefer to pursue his interests afterwards rather being the one left behind. This sort of ideology is what Greek historian Polybius claims to have led to the decline of Hellenistic world. In his work *The Histories* he writes,
"In our time all Greece was visited by a dearth of children and generally a decay of population, owing to which the cities were denuded of inhabitants, and a failure of productiveness resulted, though there were no long-continued wars or serious pestilences among us…. For this evil grew upon us rapidly, and without attracting attention, by our men becoming perverted to a passion for show and money and the pleasures of an idle life, and accordingly either not marrying at all, or, if they did marry, refusing to rear the children that were born, or at most one or two out of a great number, for the sake of leaving them well off or bringing them up in extravagant luxury." (Shukburgh, 1889, p. 510)

The reasons for the decline of the Hellenistic world were uncommon and hard to have been anticipated in history however, it’s not the case in current times. The WCED report “Our common future” expresses the concerns over similar attitudes of societies practiced even centuries later:

“People have acquired, often for the first time in history, both an idea of their relative poverty and a desire to emerge from it and improve the quality of their lives. As people advance materially, and eat and live better, what, were once luxuries tend to be regarded as necessities. The net result is that the demand for food, raw materials, and power increases to an even greater degree than the population

Dr. I. P. Garbouchev
Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
WCED Public Hearing
Moscow, 11 Dec 1986” (WCED, 1987, p. 63)

So despite of ever evolving accounting techniques there are still problems such as that of common interests and loss of diversity. After considering the examples of the Greeks and the WCED report another problem that comes forth is formulation of ideals. Not only to avoid being left behind but people also aspire to reach a certain level in their lives to finally start pursuing things they actually wanted to do. On one hand it may seem like a fair system in which everyone gets equal opportunity to reach that ideal whereas on the other, because everyone wants to get
there it becomes unsustainable\textsuperscript{15}. The consequences may vary depending upon the complexity of the system for e.g. it resulted in depopulation in case of the Greeks or in lack of fundamental resources in more current times.

In response to the lack of resources the efficiency movement promised a solution as discussed in earlier sections. It may seem that a practice of making a product that uses fewer natural resources and is available more cheaply for those who can’t afford to keep up with the rising prices due to lack of availability is beneficial for the majority. However, in the long run it maintains the gap between rich and poor rather than reducing it. Suppose that there is only one cake left with 10 pieces and the current economic distribution of wealth makes it justified for the elite minority to have 8 pieces while leaves only 2 for the rest of the majority. Ideally, for the sake of justice the rich minority should reconsider their share and give up their greed. The role played by efficiency here is to conjure up another cake or somehow increase its size which eventually maintains the same amount of share rather than fairly distributing it. Given that democracy is commonly identified to promote equality, Ray Fisman in his article \textit{the distributional preferences of an elite} asks whether economic policy should concentrate on growing the economic pie or on promoting the pie’s even distribution. He successfully concludes, in the study for the article, that elites have more tendencies towards improving economic efficiency\textsuperscript{16}.

Mukhtar Ahmed in his book Ancient Pakistan- an Archaeological History discusses a perspective of British Historian Arnold J Toynbee about collapse of societies. He writes, “Toynbee argues the breakdown of civilizations is not caused by loss of control over the environment, over the human environment, or attacks from outside. \textbf{Rather, societies that develop great expertise in}

\textsuperscript{15} In Just Sustainabilities, Agyeman discusses a view that in terms of consumption, if east followed the model of the west then it would be environmentally catastrophic. (Agyeman, 2013)

problem solving become incapable of solving new problems by overdeveloping their structures for solving old ones.” (Ahmed, 2014, P. 21) It could be possible that all the development in accounting techniques and the economic efficiency are all overdeveloped structures that makes us so engaged with solving our old problems that it renders us unadaptable to unknown or our new problems.

Lastly, Ronald Wright in his book A short history of progress quotes, “Palaeolithic hunters who learnt how to kill two mammoths instead of one had made progress. Those who learnt how to kill 200 by deriving a whole herd over a cliff had made too much. They lived high for a while, then starved.” (Wright, 2005, p. 8) A possible claim from the quote can be that such a progress trap results from the ignorance of humans as being separate from the nature as whole. Assuming the ability to self-replenish as one of the nature’s essential character, killing 2 mammoths won’t create perceptible changes as compared to killing 200 which is likely to create a profound inertia definitely unfavourable for humans.

Conclusion

Moving along with this line of thought, parallels can be drawn between the ideas of Toynbee and Wright. It could be viewed as a progress trap when societies progress in solving their old problems (for e.g. less efficient hunting techniques) and get caught up in it to the extent where they don’t realize the new problems it may cause. This is traceable if we go back to the case of eastern islands where their engagement in protecting themselves from any potential problems of that time is the very reason of their demise. Similarly, in the case of ancient Sumer where what was seen as a progress to shift from nomadic life to a settlement in one place, led to over
consumption and caused deforestation consequently. Although we might have progressed a lot in understanding the nature and nature’s response to our need and greed but the patterns of unsustainability from past can almost be superimposed on the current trends. For e.g. the development of Artificial Intelligence and Machine learning to mitigate our impacts on nature to continue the same lifestyle could be analogous to erecting more and more statues. This could be seen as possibly overdeveloping our old structures to the extent where our cognition is rendered unresponsive to any new problems.

One may say that the drastic difference in our understanding of nature now makes measures like erecting statues more of a belief rather than being logical. But that way can all the measures taken in time to avoid unfavourable circumstances also be reduced to mere beliefs because no matter how logical, practical and efficient they are none of them have solved our problems completely. The consequences may not be as adverse as the collapse of the humanity as a whole like old civilizations but the effects manifest in different ways homogenization for instance.

It may seem necessary and urgent to address the issues at hand however if doing so leads to a progress trap we may need to revisit our idea of progress which may require us to question what even the progress is! The efforts to mitigate out problems, over time, have taken a direction of finding more cures rather than prevention which implies continuing the same lifestyle and fighting its evils. Moreover, given the complex integration of our societies it becomes all the more difficult to recognize these evils. Sometimes they are felt differently at different levels in hierarchies in form of economic distribution or sometimes equally in form of nature’s response like climate change.
On the other side the efforts to discuss, question and understand progress are seldom made. Its definition is either assigned or there is an involuntary acceptance of the popular definition as seen earlier. This process combined with the concepts of Toynbee and Wright is what leads to an abundant end. Abundance, as introduced earlier is a matter of perspective and subject to change as per our needs. However, along with the popular definition of progress comes the popular ways of seeing things which limits our perspective. This limited perspective leads to an end like a progress trap wherein we get stuck with the outdated views to solve our new problems. These outdated views when extended to the level of individuals result in confusing one’s needs and demands with that of the popular culture. For e.g. you spend your time preparing and organizing for the most awaited moment of your life however when it comes it doesn’t greet you as you expected it to. Why does that happen? How do you discern your perspective blurred with the popular ideas of happiness and progress? These are the questions that are discussed, elaborated and tried to answer in the next chapter in order to reach a concept of sustainability that is not acquired but self-realized.
Chapter 2: Homogenization

The term as it sounds is self-explanatory to a lot of extent; the judgement of its meaning however, is a matter of perspective which is to be developed over the course of this chapter. In the simplest sense it pertains to everything that is considered to be in the process of becoming normal, regular, necessary, basic or constant. The question that arises next is that how does anything turn normal and necessary. The answer is not so apparent and distinct, yet it is ordinary. It is in the sense that being human is like finding oneself on a set of railroad tracks, moving along without really knowing or understanding where am I going or how I got here in the first place; it’s a matter of what appears; it’s a matter of perspective.

To form a basic and root understanding of the term, we can literally borrow the scientific concept of potential energy. For illustration, the picture on the left shows a ball placed on top of a surface or slide which is a little higher than the ground. The ball in this situation possesses a potential energy to slide down all the way to the bottom and finally stop, if pushed from the given height. What is natural, normal and regular is the fact that the movement of ball is always from the zone of high potential to low potential in order to stop and be stable. This process of sliding down or the flow or the movement (as per our interest) is what can be potentially referred as homogenization; taking place on a different paradigm like a society yet maintaining the same rules on individual level.
Pan-Parallel: What Is Perspective?

To build on the freshly laid foundation of the term homogenization, what is needed next is to understand and elaborate the direction and goal of the movement on the individual level. An abiding condition of being in a society can be imagined as being on a set of railroad tracks while facing the mirage of the joining tracks. As a goal provided naturally, the mirage becomes a natural pursuit for anyone to seek an answer for one’s doubts. However, soon after running a few miles towards it, one is likely to pause and breathe in for a while, to let in a moment of realization. This is the moment of turning back to see how far has one made from the point of start however, to his/her surprise, the sight of mirage appears again. At this point, is achieved the knowledge of one’s original position, natural givenness and the initial purpose paving way for the new one. This is the awareness required for the transformation to gain one’s own authentic perspective. This is sustainability.

This analogy of parallel lines is a way to present the social bond in which we all are together for the reasons that seem beneficial but are not self-given. To knit some relevance between the general and covert aspect of the situation, let’s go over the following poem for some more insight:

**Them are the stars.**

I look up,

them I see and them I want to be.

Told my friends, I am on the way to them.
Them I have become, so them I don't see.

For the view that rused me here

is now the view of ground from here.

I look down,

them I see and them I want to be,

Told my friends, I am on the way to them.

The poem presents a situation in life, not so particular or unique to some individual but quite common or maybe obvious to all. The three stanzas correlate with the different stages presented in the case of parallel lines. The first stanza creates a scenario where one is made to look up and acknowledge the presence of ‘stars’ which can be compared to anything which fascinates or admires an individual in a way that it triggers an action. The action that is likely to produce a sense of satisfaction upon its completion which, indeed is presented in the 2nd stanza. However, the anticipated satisfaction lasts only until its reasons are realized (For the view that rused me here is now the view of ground from here) which is why in the 3rd stanza the similar view triggers the same curiosity, enabling the same action.

Figure 4

Figure 5

Figure 6

The basic idea behind the poem can be visualized generally with the help of the pictures given above wherein; each picture from the left to right represent each stanza of the poem in
descending order. The context however, gets more diverged to reach some inferences as given below:

1) The poem starts with a situation where an individual encounters a view, “looks up”, and sets a goal (e.g. moon from the earth).

2) The goal that is created has its criteria coming from ‘situation’ before setting the goal.

3) In general, the satisfaction of its achievement is felt when one acknowledges the completion of the pursuit.(Them I have become)

4) The completion of pursuit should involve some kind a feeling/ remembrance of the situation before the pursuit of the goal, in order to realize of the completion( For e.g. the view of Earth from the moon)

5) Hence, the 3rd stanza shows a yearning to go back, stemming from the view similar to the one that brought the change in situation.

6) Therefore, the three important turning points which give a basic structure of the poem are:

   Situatedness ↔ setting a goal

   Action ↔ pursuit

   Completion ↔ realization-satisfaction

From 1) and 2) it can be seen that ‘setting of goal’ for e.g. things we admire and appreciate, result from one’s biases and dispositions based on the situatedness. 1) and 3) suggest that: What makes one feel an achievement is like an answer to the question what made one set a goal. The pictures below

Figure 7

Figure 8
give a metaphoric representation of the poem where the Figure 8 can be seen as a beginning to set a goal and the Figure 7 as a moment of completion leading to satisfaction. “Sky is the limit achieved!” states the man’s expression while legitimizing the pursuit. From co-relating 4) with the picture of the earth from moon, it can be noticed that the feeling of yearning to go back, is similar to “Don’t know what you’ve got till it’s gone”. The poem begins with the narrator telling his/her friends about the quest of achieving the stars and ends with achieving the stars again, where the only difference between the two is that the former are the stars which were admired with friends and latter are the stars which meant friends. This is where the narrator learns to create his own authentic meaning. As a result of realization one understands the fact that the stars which were admired always, after achieving them, show a starry view of the past that was taken for granted always. This is the mirage on the railroad tracks that appears again after turning back.

One of the peculiar characteristics of the abiding condition is lack of control or choice. It is a product of calculated set of rights and needs of the individuals in order for them to achieve the pre-supposed goals set by the societal demands. And these goals similar to being manufactured on a conveyer belt and bought as a destination efficiently hide the quality of a bait or requirement to enter and continue on the endless path of the parallel tracks. What makes this path an endless one is the inability to stop and realize the completion of a goal, and the fuel to keep continuing on this path is a satisfaction named progress. The system works to sustain itself based on the ideas set by the society which in this case is the homogenized definition of progress.

The case of the parallel lines opened up with the help of the poem so far manages to lay the foundation for the perspective I’m trying to build. However, to raise the structure from its ideal
grounds to more practical terms I’d like to add my personal account which will enable us to capture the essence of unsustainability up ahead on the parallel lines. To do so I’ll discuss my experiences in the light of the poem that will help us to identify a sense of direction on the map of the parallel lines.

Into The Self

Defined as a developing country in western terms, India’s reputation also precedes in the world as one of the oldest civilization. History shows that India has always attracted visitors from all the corners of the world for reasons ranging from spices to yoga and even today for its rich culture. Similarly, a lot of Indians today go to the other parts of the world sometimes just to visit for holidays, to study or work for a few years or to stay. I am an Indian. Born in a family that had a stable and improving financial situation, I had a healthy and decent upbringing. Education wise, I received 12 years of schooling in my hometown Bhopal and graduated in Bachelor of Arts Philosophy in Mumbai. As I write this, I’m pursuing a Masters in Philosophy in the United States of America. Mumbai being a coastal town went by the legend where they said that people who moved to the city from small towns will either settle there or go across the sea. I can be identified with the latter. With this brief introduction summing up my brief existence of 25 years I’d like to mention certain experiences that has given the shape through which I look at the world today. This, if at all manages to help you feel the shape of my shoes, shall lend you a vision from my standpoint.

Now that I look back, growing up always seems like much easier experience however; on the contrary when I try to look harder it was more than only easy. School as a social institution
contributes significantly in my life in terms of time (more than 12 years), personal development and social awareness. As responsible parents, they considered it their duty for their son to receive good education and the son accepted the privilege likewise. My school years from kindergarten to 12th grade forms pretty much of me. Those best days are still what I turn back to, to keep moving forward. Education, conveniently defined as ‘studies’ back then was more of a means or a path on which if you learn to walk and run you reap the benefits of spending time with your friends and doing whatever you wanted. It was all fine in my home if it was all fine with the studies. Hence I managed to safely walk on this path while being decently notorious with friends and that field.

The balance of this dichotomy somehow was always maintained however, not for long when the harmony got disturbed by the music itself. As a direct result of picking up guitar and blurring the boundaries of control I, failed in one of the subjects in the 9th grade. As a direct result of this I was denied access to my equipment and lost rights to most of the other half of the dichotomy. The balance was struck again in the 10th grade however not for long as our band was already being invited in several places by 11th grade. Not as cliché it got from there as it already sounds. It was during 11th grade when mid-term exams were nearing and our band was invited to compete in one of the great platforms in the country. To get my father’s permission I had called my friends elder brother to put in a good word (tradition held elders to be wise) which did work! However, the same night my father offered me something that was to make sense only after all of these years. He told me to leave the school and get into music permanently.

8 years later I’m here in the US interpreting my past. Everything since then in my life can be described to fill in the turn of events. I did pursue music for two years but after finishing the school and while doing graduation side by side. Getting back to the offer that I did refuse, for it
to be even considered as an offer I needed to be something different than who I was. Although it was his frustration speaking and maybe even he would’ve regretted if I had taken that path but why wouldn’t anyone accept such a freedom- Freedom from maintaining that balance in the dichotomy. Doing only what you like. How could it be a difficult choice? The fact that it was more of a dilemma than an offer gave me a glimpse that things can be more than just a matter of choosing between something easy or difficult.

As an attempt to answer I should recollect that school was almost an integral part of my life. One single consequence that was enough to lead to the decision like a reflex was that I wouldn’t be able to see my friends anymore. No matter how easier it would have made my life but it was still not worth leaving the school. It was only in school where I made friends and with whom I started the music. Although after that instance with my father I had decided that it has to be music that I’ll choose however, nobody else in my band was considering their future in the same direction. Another consequence as a direct result of the first one was that it was difficult to imagine myself out of the school. Somewhere inside I was also afraid of being left alone or what would people say. This phrase right here is a well-known phenomenon in collectivist societies like India wherein an individual faces social consequences for not following the ongoing cultural trend. The consequences can vary from public shaming in worst cases to marginalization and subsequently shaping one internally. Hence to avoid such treatment the only way that remains is to ‘fit in’ by adhering to the system. However, can it be called fitting in if I wanted to be with my friends rather than pursuing my interests? Was I afraid to stand alone or valued friends more than my interests? To get a better grasp of this newly found direction I would like like to bring back the reference of this short extract from Agyeman’s Just sustainabilities which will help us to bring in some relevance.
As a geography teacher in the UK in the early 1980’s, I was confronted by a student of mine called David, who said: ‘Sir, what do thickies [dumb kids] like me do now we’ve finished our exams?’ Nothing in my education has prepared me for this. David was not dumb. He was an average kid who felt he had failed himself and us, his teachers. He hadn’t. We’d failed him in our inability to help him flourish and find out what he was good at.” (Agyeman, 2013, p.6)

Similarities can be found between David and my situation especially when he identifies himself as dumb and how I avoided any such label out of fear. In the context of the previously raised questions, David’s situation reveals some key aspects. First that he had started to identify himself as dumb which can be seen as a case of self-devaluation probably resulting from public shaming. And second that Agyeman points at the inability of the system itself in discovering the potential of David. Furthermore, it becomes difficult for him to even find out what is good for him. This reference can be used to make the transition from personal to the social level in order to look for the answers to our questions.

While as much as it is true that I didn’t want to lose my friends it is also true that I was afraid to stand alone. Now that Agyeman has pointed at system’s negative impacts, system that is designed for the well-being of all, it is necessary to discuss in details that how and on what levels can a system shape individual and how it affects the system itself. To initiate the further contemplation on our ongoing discussion let’s begin with a famous saying from India to give an image to the idea.
Diya, as shown in the picture, is the traditional Indian Lamp made up of earthen material that contains a thick cotton thread soaked in oil to help it burn. The quote says that, “Sometimes the lamps blow off due to the lack of the oil; not always it’s the fault of the wind. The quote can be found analogous to the idea that it’s not always system’s fault and sometimes it’s just you however, in our context it should also be noticed that system can also work in ways that would demand to keep the lamp on just always. This may even reduce the thread to ashes as later when the lamp runs out of oil. What makes it interesting is that the quote still remains justified because if seen in the context of the quote the problem is indeed with the lamp however, irrespective of the same effect, in order to identify the cause one has to go beyond the purview of the system.

Now the metaphor given above can be used to see through the situations of both David and I to explain some of our individual aspects. It is possible that because system demands to keep the flame on always, David loses his own light and is rendered confused. This can also be exemplified through my case wherein I somehow felt safe if not better to finish the school rather than standing alone while still preserving the light if I’m right to believe so. Correlating this to the metaphor, it seems to explain that why anyone would keep burning their cotton thread despite of having no fuel in them. However, this reveals that although the system demands to keep the flame on there is also some lack of awareness on the individual level that works towards it because harming oneself should make a person aware of the act otherwise.
Moving on further in the acquired direction, the new question that we face is what is it in this system designed path that makes it feel safe while also keeping one unaware of the harm it causes. To answer this, we can go back to the case of David and me where how he started to identify himself as dumb and how I avoided being called like that. In the language of the system, through the tool of comparison, comes the word called Progress that performs the function of a justifier. Using this I could say that I made a progress in comparison to someone like David.

Now that we have a reason which provides a good reason to keep up with the system let’s discuss the reason further. One of the aspects of progress in the system that can be responsible to make one feel safe is that it provides a sense of heading in a right direction for e.g. my own case and that’s why it felt safer to continue on this path rather than pursuing my own inclinations. And given that I was born and brought up in a system which was followed by most of the people around me, I could only see through the system’s gauge to analyse the pros and cons of any decision. Hence, progressing on the system provided path always seemed prosperous in the popular definition. Caught in its hope I also went ahead this road as I felt it safe and nothing wrong with getting a degree while pursuing music side by side.

However, I argue that another aspect of this path is its endlessness. Now, in the context of the poem this can be seen as reaching the moon and pausing at the satisfying view of earth while continuing going higher and higher to have increasingly better view, perhaps of the solar system at this stage. This endless pursuit is similar to that experienced on the corporate ladder where one may enter as a peon and has no will to stop even after becoming CEO. Because as it can be seen in the picture below, one anticipated a
better view after getting to the top, however the view is blocked by other taller buildings. What keeps this pursuit going, on the one side is the satisfaction resulting from the identification of one-self in the increasingly better social positions created and revered by the society and on the other is the dissatisfaction resulting from the comparison with the one higher in the hierarchy. Besides endlessness another factor that picture presents is that the man is standing alone.

Going back to the context of parallel lines this can be picturized as the mirage of the meeting parallel lines in hope of which an individual keeps running. So then the new question we have now is that how does one realize that while being under a strong influence of the hope that progress gives. Why would anyone even go against it? If it is like being blinded by the hope then how does one open his/her eyes. Since we already have a way to look at the whole scenario on the map of the railroad tracks let’s go ahead with the analogy to find a way to find a way out.

Also, endlessness, is not like the feeling of safety which is given naturally in the system. On the railroad tracks, ideally this would require one to eventually stop running towards the mirage. Subjectively, there might be many such moments where one gets a glimpse of endlessness however; to stop one also needs a change of perspective to understand that experience outside the system’s purview. But given that the pull of progress is hard to let go of and the profound inertia it would exert if one was to stop immediately technically, one will have to start preparing to stop while being on the run. To explain this point I would like to now give my own account that will help us to look at the scenario in a practical manner.

In order to create a smooth flow of understanding I’d align my personal experiences along the structure of the poem so that it amplifies the rationale that has been built so far. The three stanzas of the poem can be correlated with the three stages of my life. The First stanza where the narrator
idealizes the stars can be seen as how I always thought highly of the west and always wanted to come to the US. The second stanza could be related to my arrival in the US and the third as I look back to what I had as I write this thesis. The point that is of concern here is how did I manage to look back? What was my moment of “the view that rused me here is now the view of ground from here”?

Several factors are responsible for this transition from continuing on the endless path of progress to turn around to where I came from and what made me come here. As I go further to explain the act of turning back I would like to bring to the attention of the reader that it is like trying to understand a fleeting glimpse. Coming straight from India with the marketed view of the west, initially during my first semester I got a good taste of the American dream and enjoyed the life like never before. Even being a TA I was getting paid as much as any computer engineer with 2-3 years of work experience in India while still receiving some aid from family for some time. Speaking of progress I had made some serious progress which was significant enough to be felt. And as soon as the high of the dream became normal, for a brief period of time I was seriously demotivated as there was nothing I looked forward to. Being a grad student in US I had work requirements that took me a while to get accustomed with and although it has been almost 2 and half years I still find it difficult at times to get through it. Sometimes I felt better that I had at least something to do and sometimes I felt I was caught up with it since there was no motivation to get done with it. I was almost at the verge of dropping out. It is also possible that during that time I was going through a culture shock however, seeing it from the context of progress, it can be interpreted that I had a fleeting glimpse of endlessness.

Of course not everything but I got a good chunk of what I looked forward to but soon enough it lost its attraction. Is it like your dream comes true but you run out of dreams? And more I look at
others pursue their goals more I get motivated to make new ones for myself. But no matter how much I prepare for the party, the party doesn’t feel the same. Somehow it just doesn’t feel the same. Practically, it’ll be too ideal that you fulfil your dreams so complete that you don’t get another but isn’t that how it was supposed to be? Isn’t that the idea that was always given? Isn’t this always the motivation? Only if it was possible to fulfil one dream completely! Can this be the glimpse of that endlessness?

These moments occur to me like a fleeting glimpse and I try to understand and interpret it as much as I can but life has to go on too. So, amidst this turmoil while pushing the life forward, upon reading my experiences in this thesis my professor Dr Simon asked me, “Where did the rails/parallel lines come from? How has this ‘dream’ of endlessness taken shape, in my (particular) life?” “I made it up in my mind” I replied being unable to get his context. Then he made it easier and asked, “Who laid the tracks actually?

“...because a vision softly creeping
Left its seed while I was sleeping
And the vision that was planted in my brain
Still remains within the sound of silence.”
(Simon and Garfunkel, 1966, Track 1)

The rails were laid by the colonizer, the Britons! The context becomes clear if correlated with the above lyrics and the picture. Although it has been more than 70 years since India won independence but the trains still run in the directions created by the British for their convenience. One may say (and they mostly say) that Railways is indeed beneficial for India and now it’s the country’s most cheapest and commonly used means of transport. However, if those factors really
contribute towards convenience then is that visible in the first glance of the above picture?

Figure 11 shows the current scenario of people commuting on the first ever passenger line laid in India by the British in Mumbai (Shejwalkar, 1958). Although it may look a bit congested for the people to sit tightly while rubbing their shoulders, it is still a comfortable situation for them as compared to the people who even fall asleep while standing. This can also be seen as another picture reflecting the context created in the Diya. The question that pops up now is that despite of such discomfort what makes the trip favourable to fall asleep? What keeps them going? The picture can be interpreted to depict either the immediate history or the one that is deeply rooted. Of course they are tired but is it also the acceptance of the situation in the hope for something better? I believe it’s the hope of getting down, not at the immediate destination, but the one that is dreamt of. The dream, seeds of which were planted years ago and still remains. **Is it possible that if they left their means, they left their ends too?**

**Rails and Relevance**

To substantiate the ideas created through its imagery, I’ll now discuss the relevance of rails in the literal terms in the context of colonial history of India. It cannot be a mere coincidence that first 4 cities of India that were connected together by the British (Delhi-Kolkata-Chennai-

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17 Very similar to the idea I’m creating using the imagery of Diya is an example given by Thomas J misa in his book Modernity and Technology. Right in the introduction he argues that Airports can be seen as a symbol of modernity and given that people don’t mind being lined up in a queue and paying for the seats that make their shoulders rub is a sign of its acceptance. (Misa, T.J. (2003). Modernity and Technology. Cambridge: MIT Press)
Mumbai) also remain the most developed\(^{18}\) and sought after cities in the country. Looking back from today’s context, this means of transportation is predominantly seen as a development to improve the connectivity across the nation however, the question that needs to be raised here is that was any of it needed or even demanded at that point of time?

Establishment of railways back then only contributed to serve British ends by ensuring cheap flow of raw materials and troops(to serve in the wars) to the ports (Shejwalkar, 1958). It was a major tool for yielding high profits by reducing the costs of transportation (Shekwalkar, 1958) In his article, “*But what about the railways...? The myth of Britain’s gifts to India*” Dr Shashi Tharoor expresses his indignation like this:

The construction of Indian railways is often pointed to by the apologists for empire as one of the ways in which British colonialism benefitted the subcontinent, ignoring the obvious fact that many countries also built railways without having to go through the trouble and expense of being colonised to do so… The railways were first conceived of by the East India Company, like everything else in that firm’s calculations, for its own benefit, Governor General Lord Hardinge argued in 1843 that the railways would be beneficial” to the commerce, government and the military control in the country”. In their very conception and construction, the Indian railways were a colonial scam. British shareholders made absurd amount of money by investing in the railways, where the government guaranteed returns double those of government stocks, paid entirely from Indian, and not the British, taxes. It was a splendid racket for Britons, at the expense of the Indian Taxpayer. (Tharoor, 2017)

This must make clear that there was no consideration of Indians at any point where they could be seen at the receiving end of the project. Besides Railways, another tool of convenience introduced by the British was the introduction of English as language, which just like other colonial ventures was the part of the game that worked towards serving the British ends. This

\(^{18}\) The idea of ‘developed’ can be contested however, in this context I’m basing it on a very general and commonly held notion. Based on my experiences being Indian, these cities are looked forward to move to with a hope for better employment and well-being.
was not only intended to maintain a strong foothold in the country by helping them in the purpose of translation and interpretations of the native languages but also by also infusing a distinction of British as superior which made Indians look forward to British ways of lifestyle.

Tharoor presents these facts in the same article:

*In his notorious 1835 ‘Minute on education’, Lord Macaulay articulated the classic reason for teaching English, but only to a small minority of Indians: “We must do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indians in birth and colour but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect”.* (Tharoor, 2017)

Today, the use of English as a language in India continues as a general means of communication. The urban commonage in India feel thankful for that fact as it makes it easier to communicate with someone who doesn’t speak the same language; given that there are 22 of them that are declared official. However, all of these benefits are only seen and accepted if turned back from current context and situation. In fact any changes brought in the country that seems now like a beneficial development was never intended to be seen as so. This implies a change of perspective that occurred in the post-colonial times which pre dominates the judgement even of majority of Indians and in turn prevents inquiry of one’s own history. **Does this change of perspective entail the acceptance of these developments as decoupled and neutral in terms of past sentiments associated with them?** With this question as a base to navigate further, I intend to explore this change of perspective in Indians as inertia of the post-colonial oppression.

One of the facts that is widely mentioned in colonial perspective of India is its contribution in world’s GDP before and after colonization. Before the arrival of East India Company in 1600’s India was generating 23% and Britain 1.8% however, by 1940 Britain accounted for nearly 10% and India was reduced to a poor third world country with a GDP of 3.8% and 90% of population
living below what is called as poverty line today (Tharoor, 2017). Besides the obvious downfall of economy what implies more of this fact is that India was on top of the world even prior to the use of this language of evaluation however, post colonization, India found itself identifying in the same terms which were completely foreign. This is the inclination which has led India to acquire a certain direction and pursue the ends (now as needs) left by the oppressor. With this we can move from the previously asked question, “if they left their means, they left their ends too” to a new one “Did their means create needs?”

This in the language of Paulo Freire is when the oppressed becomes the oppressor. To show how unsustainability is intertwined with oppression, I’d like to introduce Paulo Freire, a Brazilian philosopher known for his works to ameliorate the conditions of the oppressed. Having a colonial background himself, Freire went through the troubles and trauma of post-colonial situations as bad as fighting hunger which even forced him to steal for his family (Diaz, 2018). These are the experiences that made Freire inclined to work towards betterment of oppressed people. What makes him special to include in the current context is his unique way of creating awareness about one’s own condition through a process called conscientização or Concientization. It begins with the individual person becoming aware of her own social context, political context, economic context, gender, social class, sexuality, and race and how these play an important role in the shaping of her reality. The process of conscientização also entails becoming aware of our agency to choose and create our reality (Diaz, 2018). To build relevance, let’s go over some examples covered by Kim Díaz in her article on Freire:

“When a person or group of people has been socialized within an oppressive system such as slavery or patriarchy, it is often the case that the oppressed internalize the oppression and do not know that they are oppressed. To illustrate, before becoming politically aware, a woman, let us call her Jane, might behave by and within the norms of patriarchy all of her life. If, for instance,
Jane applies for a promotion at work and the promotion is denied to her but is instead given to a less qualified and younger woman, Jane's conscientização regarding sexism and ageism may begin.” (Diaz, 2018)

“Freire writes about an incident in a Latin American latifundio (plantation) where a group of armed peasants took over the plantation. For tactical reasons they wanted to keep the landowner boss as a hostage. However, not a single peasant was able to keep guard over the boss because his very presence frightened them. Freire speculates that it is possible that the very act of fighting against their boss made the peasants feel guilty. Freire concludes that, in fact, the boss was “inside” them. These peasants had internalized their master. The freedom of the peasants was not merely contingent upon them physically removing their boss from the plantation, as they had initially believed. These peasants had been thoroughly conditioned to obey orders, to behave in a submissive way, to know and keep their “place,” which they did even when the boss was no longer in power.” (Diaz, 2018)

The above examples describe the cases of Internalized oppression and bring out a few aspects associated with it. First of all one is not even aware of the oppression. Second is the guilt which is realized when the oppressed and the oppressor stand face to face as a result of which third, freedom isn’t dependent only on removing the oppressor. And fourth is the conditioning which covertly governs the oppressed even after the oppressor is gone. Now to trace these instances in India’s case we need to look both in terms of pre and post-independence situations which will eventually bring out the unsustainability associated with the current attitude of Indians.

Pre Independence Situation

Britons came in India around 1600’s only for trade purposes with the inception of the British East India Company19. However, the company gradually became aware of various possibilities

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after a major victory in Bengal\textsuperscript{20} (now West Bengal). Hence began the British rule in India for over almost two centuries from 1757-1947. As a direct result of the agenda of Macaulay and other influential leaders agenda, the rich elites from Bengal didn’t choose but preferred to have education in British established institutions\textsuperscript{21}. In my observation this move on their part however, had interesting consequences for both the parties. While on one side they did manage to create this class which was loyal for the longest time and helped them maintain a strong foothold in the country but on the other side as a result of this education gradually this class also became conscious of their oppression\textsuperscript{22}.

Similar to the examples given by Freire, the instances of awareness of oppressions began when the Indians realized the law worked differently for them. One of the instances that is highly mentioned of and which stimulated the awareness was when Indians studied the works of oriental scholar like Max Müller, who in their works had presented ancient India as a great civilisation. This resulted in the recollection of the identity which was well revered even by foreigners (Rag, 1995) Another instance is when Indians learned about their social position through experiencing racism in employment\textsuperscript{23}. One of the most sought after benefits of getting educated in British institutions was getting employed in Indian Civil services which where most of the top level positions were held by the British (Nojeim, 2004). Yet another instance was the Ilbert bill which was introduced to allow Indian judges to try accused Europeans. However, the

\textsuperscript{20} Lyall, A.C. (1894). The Rise and Expansion of British Dominion in India. Retrieved from: https://books.google.com/books?id=bYAOAAAAMAAJ\&printsec=frontcover\&source=gbs_ge_summary_r\&cad=0\#v=onepage\&q=&f=false

\textsuperscript{21} It will be interesting to know that this class of people didn’t only want English as the medium of instruction but even protested against proposals of change in such a system. (Acharya, P. (1988). Is Macaulay still our Guru. Economic and Political Weekly. Vol. 23, No. 22, pp. 1124-1130. Retrieved from: https://www.jstor.org/stable/4378557?read-now=1\&seq=2\#page_scan_tab_contents


Anglo Indians quickly protested and within an year, solution as a way of compromise was adopted according to which a jury should have at least 50% Europeans whenever a European was being tried, in 1885 (Kaul, 1993) This also paved the way for formation of Indian National Congress (Dobbin, 2008)

These instances made Indians realize their position in the system. Formation of the political party besides, as a direct consequence of the needs that arose, was also an initiative of a British retired Civil service officer Allan Octavian Hume (Rag, 1995). Initially their aim was to obtain a fair share in government for educated Indians, and to create a platform for civic and political dialogue between them and the British. Hence the Party mainly comprised of educated Indians who mainly sought reforms in employment opportunities in various divisions of Civil Services and in the Army(Rag, 1995). However, by 1907 Congress was split into two factions: Radicals and the Moderates. The former demanded complete independence and boycott all British goods while the latter were loyalists and just wanted reforms such as larger number of elected representatives in central and provincial legislatures24.

However, during World War one, the Congress in 1914 decided to support the Britain both as a matter of duty and in a spirit that Britain would repay India's loyalty and gratitude and enable India to take along step forward on the road to self-government25. About 152,500 Indian soldiers served (Jack, 2014). Recognizing massive support of India and their renewed demands, the British passed the Government of India Act 1919, which introduced the principle of a dual mode of administration in which both elected Indian legislators and appointed British officials shared power. Responsibilities such as agriculture, local government, health, education, and public

works, were handed over to Indians, while more sensitive matters such as finance, taxation, and maintaining law and order were retained by the provincial British administrators (Ahir, 2018).

This act of extending the helping hand in Freire’s language is called as **False Generosity**. In his book pedagogy of the oppressed he writes, “in order to have the continued opportunity to express their generosity the oppressors must perpetuate injustice as well. An unjust social order is the permanent fount of this “generosity” which is nourished by death, despair, and poverty.” (Freire, 2014, p. 44)

What makes India’s struggle for independence special is Gandhi and his unique ways of protests. After leading successful protests to help Indians secure rights in South Africa Gandhi returned to India in January 1915 (Ahir, 1915). Under his mentorship he was made aware of the Indian issues and the politics. However, in contrast to the Moderates’ ideologies, as he learned about the situations brought about by the British scheme in India, gradually he realized that Indians would never receive equal treatment under the British rule. On the other hand he was also impressed by the protests initiated by Radical leaders such as Swadeshi movement which involved boycotting of anything British. In Gandhi’s own words, "civil disobedience is civil breach of unmoral statutory enactments." However he always maintained that it had to be carried out non-violently by withdrawing co-operation with the corrupt state. Of course, these ideas and strategies initially appeared impractical to some Indians and Congressmen.

At this juncture, a little piece of information about Gandhi’s non-violent civil resistance called *Satyagraha* (truth force) would help us understand his ideology against the obvious methods of force.
**Satyagraha** satya: "truth", agraha: "insistence" or "holding firmly to" or holding onto truth or truth force – is a particular form of nonviolent resistance or civil resistance. The word satya is derived from sat which means ‘being’. Nothing exists except in reality except truth. This was critical to Gandhi’s understanding of and faith in nonviolence: "The world rests upon the bedrock of satya or truth. Asatya, meaning untruth, also means non-existent, and satya or truth also means that which is. If untruth does not so much as exist, its victory is out of the question. And truth being that which is can never be destroyed" (Naglar, 2014). Thus the use of non-violence in Satyagraha is not just a requirement rather it’s an integral part of it. If truth is the end, non-violence (ahimsa) is the means. (Salla, 1993) Since truth can never be destroyed this must give the satyagrahi a strong faith to continue the agraha (insistence). In his own words,

“In the application of satyagraha, I discovered in the earliest stages that pursuit of truth did not admit of violence being inflicted on one’s opponent but that he must be weaned from error by patience and compassion. For what appears to be truth to the one may appear to be error to the other. And patience means self-suffering. So the doctrine came to mean vindication of truth, not by infliction of suffering on the opponent, but on oneself.”(Salla, 1993, p. 52)

The view differs from the idea that the goal in any conflict is necessarily to defeat the opponent or frustrate the opponent’s objectives, or to meet one’s own objectives despite the efforts of the opponent to obstruct these. In Satyagraha, by contrast, the objective is to convert, not to coerce, the wrong-doer. **In the end, there is neither defeat nor victory but rather a new harmony**²⁶.

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²⁶ David M. Traboulay in his article Mahatma Gandhi’s Satyagraha and Non Violent Resistance quotes Erik Erikson’s (Sigmund Freud’s disciple) interpretation about Satyagraha, “Gandhi’s way...is that of a double conversion: the hateful person, by containing his egotistic hate and by learning to love the opponent as human, will confront the opponent with an enveloping technique that will force, or rather permit, him to regain his latent capacity to trust and love. In all these and other varieties of confrontation, the emphasis is not so much (or not entirely) on the power to be gained as on the cure of an unbearable inner condition.” (Traboulay, D.M. (1997). Mahatma Gandhi’s Satyagraha and NonViolent Resistance. New York: CUNY Academic Works. p. 8-9. Retrieved from: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=si_pubs)
While many find the idea to go through the pain oneself to be elusive and impractical, many a movements led by Gandhi practiced this philosophy and showed results even before the complete independence of India. One of the first successful movements was carried out in 1917 at Champaran where the local peasants were forced to grow indigo and sell it at a fixed price. Upon the request of the Rajkumar Shukla27, Gandhi along with a team of lawyers started surveying the villages and grasped the basic lifestyle of the villagers in the region. (Traboulay, 1997). The problem of course was exploitation of the farmers wherein the landlords forced the farmers to grow indigo (one of the biggest sources of profits for the colonial rule) in 3/20 parts of their land. The exploitation reached its peak when the competition came from German synthetic indigo and the losses were compensated by reducing the wages of the farmers. They ended up using their best lands to grow Indigo and couldn’t pay much attention to their own crops. Besides that the landlords even demanded the mortgage deeds and charged high rates of interests. All of these factors gave immense control to the landlords to continue the exploitation. (Traboulay, 1997). Noticing Gandhi’s involvement with the farmers, the planters association pulled their strings and managed to send him a legal notice to leave while he was travelling through different villages of Champaran. Of course, he did not leave but was willing to face the consequence of his acts. Never the less, the recognition of his massive support bailed him out. Finally, when he presented his report (which represented the statements of some 4000 farmers) to the authorities, the inquiry committee after three months of research, voted in the favour of the farmers.

However, David Traboulay in his article “Mahatma Gandhi’s Satyagraha and Non Violent Resistance” mentions that satyagraha for Gandhi was not just the political victory but“ he wanted

the victory to lead to the measures to improve the lives of the village” (Traboulay, 1997, p 89).

Gandhi helped establish village schools that offered all round education wherein besides history and scientific education for children under 12, the adult were also educated about hygiene and were taught advantages of the cooperative work for the promotion of communal welfare (Traboulay, 1997) This was followed by series of movements, some as successful as in Champaran and some that adhered to the principals of Satyagraha for the most part (sometimes they were called off by Gandhi when they turned violent) eventually, significantly contributed towards the independence of the nation in 1947.

Parallels can be drawn between Gandhi’s Satyagraha and Freire’s context of oppression especially in terms of non-violence as a means to protest. In his pedagogy of the oppressed Freire writes, “But almost always, during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or sub-oppressors” (Freire, 2014, p. 45) and suggest that rather “they should work to restore the humanity of the both”. The oppressor here can mean both as a sub oppressor to the rest of the oppressed or practicing the oppressive ways (as a reaction) on the oppressor as well. However, Freire understands that this may seem like a step towards liberation but clarifies that it is not. This kind of understanding is also well reflected in an argument given by Gandhi to follow non-violence as a means to attain freedom:

“If I want to deprive you of your watch, I shall certainly have to fight for it; if I want to buy your watch, I shall have to pay for it; and if I want a gift, I shall have to plead for it; and, according to the means I employ, the watch is stolen property, my own property, or a donation.” (Gandhi, 1909, p. 287)

Using the above example Gandhi tries to show the importance of the means to reach the end.

According to Gandhi, the means and the ends are inseparable due to which it would be
contradictory to fight injustice with injustice (violence). Correspondingly, in Freire’s context one ends up becoming the oppressor oneself in using violence (oppressor’s way) to fight injustice. If practiced like this, then they both meet on the same point of oppressor’s realization which in Gandhi’s sense is referred as conversion not by coercion of the wrong doer and restoration of humanity of the oppressor in Freire’s terms.

Throughout this section we get to see a brief history of Indian struggle for freedom which was analysed in Freire’s terms and perspective. Specifically, it outlined the instances of awareness that initiated the struggle and constant moves undertaken by Indian Freedom fighters that gave the struggle its direction. Now, as highlighted earlier, the instances of guilt, freedom and conditioning are to be discussed in the Post-independence situation.

**Post-Independence Situation**

Continuing with the Gandhian perspective of ‘means and ends’ and Freire’s context of oppression, for the further analysis of the post-independence situation of India it will be needed to bring to the attention the previously asked question, “Did their means create needs?” The means here was being referred to the changes they brought in then situation such as railways, culture and language. So far it has been established that most of these means were meant to serve their ends however, still are being used by Indians in their daily lives. The aim now is to show how India is still practicing the oppressor’s model. To begin with, following are the facts that give an overall idea of India’s post-independence conditions:
1) For most of the colonial period, landlessness had been rising, so that the number of landless agricultural labourers grew from 13 per cent of the agricultural population in 1871 to 28 per cent in 1951. The increase in tenant-farming and share-cropping and overcrowding of agriculture was followed by an extreme subdivision of land into small holdings and fragmentation (Chandra et al., 1999, p. 12)

2) During the nineteenth century, there was a quick collapse of Indian handicraft and artisanal industries largely because of the competition from the cheaper imported manufactures from Britain together with the policy of free trade imposed on India. The ruined artisans failed to find alternative employment. The only choice open to them was to crowd into agriculture as tenants, sharecroppers and agricultural labourers. While modern industries did develop in India, it did not even compensate for the handicraft industries it displaced. (Chandra et al., 1999, p. 12)

3) The vast majority of towns had no modern sanitation and large parts of even those cities which did, were kept out of the system, modern sanitation being confined to areas where the Europeans and rich Indians lived. A modern water supply system was unknown in villages and absent in a large number of towns. (Chandra et al., 1999, p. 15)

With these damages brought by the Britons after a 200 year rule, the newly formed government had to take steps in the direction, which seemed to be most practical in the circumstances. At this juncture the leaders of free India held two different opinions regarding the development. One of them was given by Jawaharlal Nehru who was the First Prime minister of the independent India. Nehru, who was also Gandhi’s young comrade and his right hand, always considered the economic problem the most important one that India faced, and was convinced all other potential
problems would be sorted by the installation of the perfect economic system (Misra, 1995). He wanted to focus on the issues such as economic development, industrialization, science and technology, cooperative farming, land reforms etc. so that the nation was in par with the other developed nations of the world (Misra, 1995). While he entirely opposed of Gandhian development (as it shall be discussed in the next section) which more in favour of rural development, he was a strong proponent of industrialization and showed preference towards it through his policies. Being aware of the role of scientific progress in developed societies, he believed exposure to science will take the country a long way. O.P Misra in his book, *Economic Thought of Gandhi and Nehru: A comparative analysis* writes that, “He was of firm conviction that if his countrymen were to develop a scientific temper it would be much easier to introduce the modern techniques of production and distribution in every sector of the economy” (Misra, 1995, p. 75). Thus, his policies resulted in establishments of the prestigious institutes of India such as IITs (Indian Institutes of Technology), NITs (National Institutes of Technology), CSIR (Council of Scientific and Industrial Research), the AIIMS (All India Institutes for Medical Sciences) etc.

On the other hand, Gandhi held much different views for India’s development. While mostly known for the non-violent methods of resistance, the other branch of Satyagraha is the

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28 Ashutosh Varshney in his book “Democracy, development and the countryside: Urban-Rural Struggles of India” mentions under Nehru’s industrial strategy steel, power and machines became the major focus. He also shows that in the second five year plan, for which the main focus was rapid industrialization, the outlay in the agriculture and irrigation dropped from 34.6% to 17.5%. Varshney, A. (1998, September 18) Democracy, Development and Countryside: Urban-Rural Struggles in India. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 38. Retrieved from: https://books.google.com/books?id=bnNPJKw9CDsC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v= onepage&q&f=false

Besides him V.V. Bhatt in his paper Development Problem, Strategy and Technology Choice: Sarvodaya and Socialist Approaches in India also writes that according to Nehru’s strategy, “cottage industry had to be tolerated with a view to provide employment in the short run but the main objective was to develop modern large scale industries that would supplant the traditional sector.” Bhatt, V. (1982). Development Problem, Strategy, and Technology Choice: Sarvodaya and Socialist Approaches in India. Economic Development and Cultural Change, 31(1), 85-99. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/1153645
Constructive programme. The former is sometimes referred as the obstructive program while, the latter can be considered as the second step in Satyagraha. Compared to Nehru’s idea of development who believed solving economic problems would ultimately uplift the human conditions, Gandhi’s approach begins dealing with an individual directly. A glimpse of Gandhi’s perspective can be traced from his idea of boycotting British goods not just to hurt their economy but at the same time promoting Indian goods to bring self-sufficiency and convince the public and the opposition that the resistance is not just about disruption.

For Gandhi *Purna Swaraj* or complete independence was not only about freedom from foreign domination but also freedom in terms of self-sufficiency experienced in the root level. To address the issue of division based on caste and creed which was fostered by British policy of divide and rule, Gandhi advises the congressmen to seek the unity that is more of heartfelt unlike political unity which may be imposed. The latter he mentions can be a natural fruit if the former is cultivated. Gandhian economics drew no distinction between economics and ethics. R.K. Prabhu and U.R. Rao in their book Mind of Mahatma Gandhi mention Gandhi’s own words, “policies that hurt the moral well-being of an individual or a nation is immoral, and therefore sinful, irrespective of the economic value gained therein (Prabhu & Rao, 1967, p. 263). For this very reason, Gandhi was sceptical about adopting industrialization and questioned the fundamentals of development. Also, opposition to large scale industrialization was probably based on his empirical observation that even though considerable development of modern industry had occurred in British India over the fifty years.

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30 Ibid.8
1881-1931, there was no appreciable increase in gainfully employed workers over this period – whatever increase in employment had occurred in the organized sector was counterbalanced by the fall in employment in the traditional sector. He believed that the value of an industry should be gauged less by the dividends it pays to shareholders than by its effect on the bodies, soul and spirits of the people employed in it (Roy, Blomqvist & Clark, 2012, 248). Moreover, to Gandhi, technology was to be feared because it threatened the very basis of a dignified human existence. He writes “In modern terms, it is beneath human dignity to lose one’s individuality and become a mere cog in the machine. I want every individual to become a full blooded member of the society (Prabhu & Rao, 1967, p.242). Gandhi distinguished between 'Standard of Living' and 'Standard of Life'. He writes, “A rise in the standard of living may even lower the standard of life by reducing man’s physical, moral, intellectual and spiritual standards” (Spring, 20145, p. 168).

Standards of living for him means just “increased income and acquisition of material goods whereas standard of life represents major deviation from the dominant global commitment to economic growth as improving human lives” (Spring, 2015, p.168). He was aware that Industrialization on a mass scale will necessarily lead to passive or active exploitation of the villagers once the problems of competition and marketing come in. Hence he placed a major emphasis on peace, "trusteeship" and co-operation which has been touted as an alternative to competition (the opposite of the notion that competition allows for innovation and entrepreneurship that betters the market and in turn, society); which may result in conflict between different economic and income classes in societies31.

One of his most widely discussed ideas for India’s revival is ‘Khadi’ a hand spun clothing material that reflected the era of struggle for freedom, when the foreign clothing was boycotted. While it began as a means to portray resistance and affect the economy of the oppressor government, Gandhi saw the potential in keeping up the production to strengthen the economy of the independent India. Since he didn’t differentiate between Ethics and economics, Khadi for him was a non-violent means to achieve economic freedom. In his book of constructive programme he writes, “It connotes the beginning of economic freedom and equality of all in the country” (Gandhi, 1941, p.12)

The main idea behind khadi was to adopt decentralization of production by villages producing all their necessities and a certain percentage in addition for the requirement of the cities. However, because of his opinions which are discussed earlier, he wanted the heavy industries to be centralized and occupy the least space in the vast national activity which was mainly supposed to be carried out in the villages. (Gandhi, 1941) Many questioned the practicality of adopting this direction of khadi mentality for the economic development of India. Being aware of the poor faith in his ideas he wrote in his Constructive Programme, “Let everyone try, and he or she will find out for himself or herself the truth of what I’m saying” (Gandhi, 1941, p. 11) Besides khadi, he covers various other topics ranging from labour rights, untouchability, students, adult education, women to even English as a language of domination (Gandhi, 1941)

Having discussed the two different outlooks towards the development of a colonized nation, I would now on the basis of Freire’s philosophy analyse the inclination to believe in Nehru’s ideas and their long term effects in India. This is needed to finally show how post-colonial oppression and its ignorance have led to unsustainable practices in India.
While the development brought by Nehru paid off if seen as in western terms of growth, in Freire’s language it can also be seen as in pursuing the direction left by the oppressor. Freire writes, “Their vision of the new man or woman is individualistic; because of their identification with the oppressor, they have no consciousness of themselves as persons or as members of an oppressed class. It is not to become free that they want agrarian reform, but in order to acquire land and thus become landowners—or, more precisely, bosses over other workers.” In this context Freire is talking about the oppressed peasants in Brazil who saw their freedom as landowners rather than wanting land reforms to alleviate their situation (wanting land reforms is about getting into a dialogue which is bypassed in becoming a landowner). He also emphasizes on the loss of their consciousness as a result of the oppressed situation because of which their idea of freedom comes from the oppressor who they see as the only non-oppressed thus the free one. Hence along with this idea comes the definition and idea of freedom out of and bound to the context of their oppressive relationship. In support of Gandhi’s constructive program, Michael Nagler in his ‘The Non-violence Handbook’ also argues that, “a well-developed constructive programme builds an infra structure for a new society before the old society crumbles, preventing the emergence of a power vacuum into which new repressive elements often rush.” (Nagler, 2014) Correspondingly, it can be said that while fighting for the external oppression India didn’t so actively address its internal oppression. By choosing the direction left by the British, India can be seen as following the oppressor ways. Also, more than a choice it was an inclination left by them, if understood as a pull of the ‘power vacuum’ which is why it felt more rational than adopting Gandhi’s way. As mentioned earlier, the reason given by Nehru and well accepted by most of the Congressmen was that India needed to be in par with the rest of the world so that there is no dependence for its own needs. This right here can be seen as
the need to identify oneself with the oppressor which is also rationalized in the name of freedom. What made it problematic to stand together with the rest of the world in that period was that it didn’t give India a space and time to understand its own virtues. This is not in direct support of Gandhi’s idea of Khadi mentality because that will then be just romanticism but I do hold that it still based India’s development on age old practices of the country like cottage and small home based industries. If seen this way Gandhi’s policies were based on the majority of the population which was located in villages as compared to Nehru’s vision which mainly catered to the needs of the cities grown out of the seeds of increased appetite.

However, keeping democracy in mind it’s difficult to argue for any of their visions but it’s still possible to analyse the consequences in terms of Freire. Besides, the traditional occupations of the villages, Indians under the British rule had also acquired the skill to work for the Industrial development of the country. Now already impressed by Industrial progress of the western nations, Nehru, to execute and sustain his heavy industrial projects for the future, emphasized engineering education. This goes hand in hand with the foundation of several Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) which received national importance from the government. Although, Nehru considered it important to undertake steps to build the infrastructure of the nation, the profession of engineers still has colonial roots associated with it. The first native engineers alongside of the Britons were mainly working for the East India Company to build roads, bridges and later for the railways under the crown rule. However, the motivation for these people to join the profession came from the fact that it provided a good stability, government housing and government honours for long serving officers (Ramnath, 2018). Aparajith Ramnath, in his article ‘The Emergence of Engineering as a Profession in Modern India, quotes about KL Rao’, “
“K.L. Rao, a famous hydraulic engineer turned minister, recorded in his memoirs that he trained as an engineer in the pre-Independence period because his ‘brother … was observing in my village the style in which the officers of the Irrigation Department were living and the launches and boats in which the officers were travelling in the Masulipatnam canal near our village.’” (Ramnath, 2018)

Although, this motivation is common for anyone seeking a good and comfortable life, what makes it different is that again it was a means openly serving the colonial ends. Besides seeing it in terms of Gandhi’s explanation of means and ends, as articulated by Freire, it also illustrates the false generosity of the oppressor to keep the oppression going. This is done by creating a class who will be adherent to the oppressor which eventually divides the oppressed among themselves. Hence the term Divide and Rule. As a result of this, the people joining this field today are still likely to be motivated by the same reason, while expecting the same lifestyle which used to be a product of colonial revenue model\(^\text{32}\). As a matter of fact many of the early industrialists were neutral towards the imperial government as they received all the technical know-how from them to start their businesses. This also points out the prescriptive nature of the oppressed reality. Freire writes, “One of the basic elements of the relationship between the oppressors and the oppressed is prescription. Every prescription represents the imposition of one individual's choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the preserver’s consciousness. Thus, the behaviour of the oppressed is a prescribed behaviour, following as it does the guidelines of the oppressor.” (Freire, 2014, p. 47) Irrespective of the class, examples of this can be seen even in the most of the cases of diverse industrial development in India before and for a long time after the independence. Dwijendra

\(^\text{32}\) Also, this explains the pull left by the oppressors-everybody seeking the same goal-hence creating a traffic and more pressure on the limited resources.
Tripathi, in his paper on “Colonialism and the technology choices in India” mentions that during the early and the later phase of industrialization in India, most of the industrialist blindly and almost uncritically accepted the solutions given by the Britons. He calls it the “uncritical fascination for the British Technology” (Tripathi, 1996, p. 89) and claims that it happened in most of the industries such as textile, steel, hydro power, cement, sugar etc. He gives a detailed course of development in the textile industry and argues that even “when mechanical devices, more compatible with the Indian conditions, were available, the Indians, by and large, continued to patronize the technology the British manufacturers favoured” (Tripathi, 1996, p. 81).

Furthermore, he argues that Tatas the founder of the cotton textile mill and steel industry in India, even after the establishment of a few technical institutes, didn’t show any interest in technological autonomy and continued to depend on the foreign technical personnel for any new product their company started (Tripathi, 1996).

While a long way from the initial stage of imitation and replication, India now is able to carry on its own research and relies relatively less on the foreign help. Examples of some accolades are Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) which has one of the highest rates of successful space shuttle launches in the world. Another case the India boasts about is the Bhaba Atomic Research Centre (BARC) which was able to develop its own nuclear reactors. However, despite of the independence shining out of these examples, India can be seen as still emerging out of the purviews left by the oppressors. For instance, although it’s an ongoing research for 27 years now to come up with a technology to harness Thorium, of which the highest reserve is in India, the

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33 In his paper Colonialism and technology choices of India Dwijiendra Tripathi argues that most of the Indians suffered a ‘colonial syndrome’ during the formative years of Textile industry. He defines, “By Colonial syndrome I mean an instinctive inclination of the subject people to emulate practices, behaviour and institutions of the ruling country, resentment against political subjugation notwithstanding. (Tripathi, D. (1996, March) Colonialism and the Technology Choice of India: A Historical Review. The developing Economies 34(1), 80-97)
country continues to depend on the foreign source of Uranium for the Nuclear Energy. This shows that, even 75 years after independence, ultimately post-colonial inertia has channelized its way out even in the Industrial path of Nehru.

Another major and most explaining example of the prescription is English as a language. Prior to the birth of both Nehru and Gandhi, as a result of the oppressive move by Lord Macaulay in 1835 to teach English to only a small minority and create a different class of Indians, many Indians did feel a need to identify themselves with this newly created class\(^{34}\) (the incentives as mentioned earlier). This way, more than just a means of communication and translation of thoughts, English in India derived its context from oppression. The apparent post-colonial impacts include compulsory environment of spoken English in majority of the schools in urban centres and the resembling incentive in the long run is better job prospects for those who are fluent.

These examples displaying the prescribed behaviour of the Indians and the issues faced as an indirect consequences of the same reflects the angle of the Indian system as still today practicing and pursuing the oppressor’s way. The oppressor’s ways, such as the language, the trains, and industrialization can all be seen as a lead left by the oppressors to follow, fuelled by the rationale justified in the name of progress. Using the tools given by Freire to analyse the pre and post-independence situations of India, so far I have tried to show how the history of oppression has deeply \textbf{conditioned} the system of India and hence the psyche that governs the individual. Now to show how deeply ingrained is unsustainability with and around the oppression, I will highlight the dominoes initiated in colonial times to understand its modern manifestations.

\(^{34}\) It should be interesting to note that in the Indian caste system historically there was always a sense of respect for the ‘elite’ Brahma class, who also had a special ‘ruling’ language—Sanskrit; similarities between class and caste make the system of oppression easier to implement]
To bring out the most commonly known implications of unsustainability, the best example to begin with is the Indigo plantation. While the history of Indigo in India goes way before the British arrived, the significance in our context comes out of the oppressive Imperial agenda. Being one of the profitable commodities in the colonial era because of its high demand in Europe, British did their best to ensure its cultivation. However, soon enough Germany came up with synthetic Indigo with cheaper price yet similar quality which was responded with starting Indigo research in the ‘colony of India’ to improve the quality and maintain its demand in the market. (Kumar, 2007). Even after years of research, nothing beneficial was coming out to compete with its German counterpart which resulted in closing down of the research Facilities in 1913. (Kumar, 2007) The only meaningful result which came about was diagnosing the attack of pests which was caused by deficiency of essential nutrients like phosphates. It was established that this situation arose as a result of non-stop growing of Indigo for many years which didn’t let the soil replenish itself and; the use of fertilizers would still take a lot of time (Kumar, 2007). On one hand for the farmers this affected the other crops for the British planters on the other; it made the burden heavier along with the competition from Germany which they chose to dump on the growers by raising taxes.

Throughout the history of Indigo cultivation, the growers faced injustices like less remuneration, raised taxes, forceful increase in the share of the land to grow Indigo from 2/20-3/20. While the instances of injustices are common in an oppressive imperial rule, the roots of unsustainability are far deeper and long lasting than just an unfertile land. As mentioned earlier, one of the most important aspects of post oppression inertia has always been a ‘definite direction’ left by the oppressor. The direction in the case of indigo comes from the introduction of money by the British as a way to pay taxes instead ‘in a kind’ (which generally used to be the produce for the
farmers) as it was in the Pre British Period\textsuperscript{35}. This totally worked in favour of the British by granting them the control over the farmers. Furthermore, since the tax amount was fixed irrespective of the seasons with bad harvest, most of their attention was given to grow the crops which would fetch them cash instead of food crops which they also grew earlier for their own needs. It can be argued that one of the worst famines of Bengal could have been avoided if the farmers had some produce for their own needs.

Here, the unsustainability comes out as a result of the economic policy of commodification for capital gains. As I’ll show in the next few sections, such oppression leads to the \textbf{conditioning} of the farmers which is reflected in the \textbf{choice} they make while failing to take care of their needs. They were conditioned to secure their future rather than taking care of their present needs.

Metaphorically, the situation of the farmer can be compared to the nutritionally exhausted piece of land which is continued to harvest on. Now, years after independence, it would be safe to say that the situation of farmers in the country hasn’t experienced a significant difference in their livelihood. While the few states have made a good progress, a common face of a farmer in most of the states generally depict a common agony. The farmers from the same Champaran which marked the beginning of Satyagraha in the country through indigo revolt still fight for their lands since the government of the independent India has supported the rich sugar mill owners who bought most of the lands after the British left. Even after passing the Act of Fixation of Ceiling

\textsuperscript{35} Amiya Bagchi in his paper Land Tax, Property Rights and Peasants Insecurity in Colonial India discusses different ways, how tax in form of money instead of a kind despite of price drop or price rise of the produce, ultimately was a burden to the farmers. (Bagchi, A.K. (1992). Land Tax, Property Rights and Peasants Insecurity in Colonial India. The Journal of Peasant Studies. Vol 20. p. 9-15)
& Acquisition of Surplus Land in 1961 (which put a limit on land one could own) the land is still possessed mainly by mill owners and industrialists. 

Similarly, the most cases of suicide come from Marathawada district of Maharashtra state, where farmers suffer a lot of mental pressure falling in a debt trap. While the government of India provides an efficient Minimum Supported prices for the seeds of Cash crops such as sugar, cotton and rice, the politicians from the state government of Maharashtra themselves have established quite a many sugar mills. This creates a direction for the farmers as the crop is incentivized by central and state by increasing the profit by avoiding the middle men between farmers and the sugarcane factories. However, Marathawada being a semi-arid region, and no good irrigation facilities, growing a water intensive crop like sugarcane has only brought drought to the region which affects no one but the farmer.

“Mardaj village in Prabhani district sits on the bank of the river Godavari, but the river bed is dry (the feeder dam has not released water for some years now) and so are the fields, except if it is sugarcane. In early June, villagers sat quietly in the house of Mukhiram Khare, a 37-year-old sugarcane farmer who hanged himself on the single tree in his courtyard 5 days earlier. ‘He dug a bore last year for the sugarcane, then dug another, and then another,’ says his father Triyambaka Khare” (Deshmukh, 2016)

Calling this an act of corrupted government or selfish politicians will be a hasty remark made out of similar inconsiderate attitude towards history. The situation almost entirely replicates the colonial times where the close resemblance appears between the role of the Britons and the

36 Kundan Pandey, the co-author of the news article Champaran Satyagraha Continues includes an interview of a resident from one of the villages of Champaran who claims that in West Champaran more than 55000 hectare of land is under illegal possession of the landlords and industrialists, which the current government of course denies. (Pandey, K. Goswami, S. Gandhi, T. (2017, April 11) Champaran Satyagraha Continues. Down To Earth. Retrieved from: https://www.downtoearth.org.in/coverage/agriculture/champaran-satyagraha-continues-57466)

current government, famine and drought, and the situation of the farmers back then and today. With respect to another class of Independent India, another aspect of unsustainability which comes out of the oppression is the **appetite** left by the oppressors i.e. the appetite to achieve the colonial based lifestyle. Going back to the example of KL Rao whose brother told him of the perks of being an engineer during the colonial times, Aparijith Ramnath traces the same reasons to explain the influence of this profession in today’s times. This gets justified and even brings out long term consequences when one looks at the current situation of engineering graduates in India. According to the National Employability Report - Engineers 2016 from Aspiring Minds, in 2014 only 18.43% of engineers were employable for the software services sector, 3.21% for software products and 39.84% for Business Process Outsourcing. For 2016, these numbers were: 17.91%, 3.67% and 40.57% respectively for IT Services, IT Products and Business Process Outsourcing (NER Engineers, 2016) Keeping in mind the original motivation of engineering combined with the prescriptive attitude internalized during the colonial time, the occurrence of such an event shouldn’t seem surprising.

“More and more ordinary citizens - both young people thinking about their education and careers, and of course their parents - also assume that an engineering degree is the best passport to a lucrative career as an IT professional” (Fuller & Narsimhan, 2005)

A possible explanation to bring out the unsustainability in this situation comes from the **progress trap**. As discussed in the first chapter, progress trap is a result of the perspective that brings progress by solving current problems but in the long run becomes limited and is not updated to solve new problems. Since many Indians found engineering a profession promising a good lifestyle, a large number are pursuing it to the extent that now it has reached its peak where colleges started producing more engineers yet the candidates don’t cater to the requirements of the companies. Now, caught in the progress trap are most of the graduates who remain
unemployed as a result of their limited perspective who couldn’t see beyond only one branch of engineering or even any other profession for that matter. Furthermore they get this perspective in a form of prescription from their friends or family member. What this entails in our context is that they still depend on the prescription which prevents them from learning their own virtues and what they are good at. In this way the unsustainability here is the loss of human potential and in turn the loss of human resources in the prevalent language. The same limited perspective belonging to such a system however justifies such a loss in the name of competition and therefore by the end of a day it gets its new identity as a highly competitive field.

As a direct consequence of the limited perspective, yet another aspect of unsustainability that comes about is loss of diversity. Whether it’s in terms of crops which gets neglected due to government policies or only selected fields which most people look to pursue for the sake of the promising future, a society loses diversity in various dimensions. What makes it unsustainable is clearly seen in form of suicide committed by farmers who directly suffer the brunt of government policies favouring only cash crops and students who suffer unemployment and fail to understand their own abilities. As a result it prevents people from pursuing anything that is not so well defined and understood by the system and results in loss of diversity.

While on one side the unsustainability comes in terms of loss of human resources and human potential, the other aspect which is not so easily recognizable is the endlessness inherent in progress. Endlessness as mentioned earlier is that aspect of progress which makes you want to achieve in an interminable manner. The dissatisfaction that drives this behaviour can be traced back to the chapter 1, wherein a picture is shown of a kid who is caught looking out of the window in a classroom but later agrees with his teacher to get back to work as he doesn’t want to be left behind. It illustrates the conformity associated with the progress. The consequences with
those who couldn’t keep up with the pace of progress are clear as seen in the case of unemployed engineering graduates, while those who do keep up, many of them would be doing it out of passion and well aware interest in the field but many I argue, might just be keeping up as a result of conformity and are likely to get trapped in its endlessness. Freire writes,

The oppressed, who have adapted to the structure of domination in which they are immersed, and have become resigned to it, are inhibited from waging the struggle for freedom so long as they feel incapable of running the risks it requires. When they discover within themselves the yearning to be free, they perceive that this yearning can be transformed into reality only when the same yearning is aroused in their comrades. But while dominated by the fear of freedom they refuse to appeal to others, or to listen to the appeals of others, or even to the appeals of their own conscience. They prefer gregariousness to authentic comradeship; they prefer the security of conformity with their state of unfreedom, to the creative communion produced by freedom and even the very pursuit of freedom. (Freire, 2014, p. 47)

As laid down in the history of India’s colonialism, it took quite a while to get aware of their oppression and finally break out of the conformity. It would be safe to say, the post-colonial India suffers from the resembling structures of oppression in the current society. As seen the class of engineers like KL Rao and the middle class who managed to secure the positions in the Civil services, even today the sense of security lies in the acknowledgement when the oppressed sees himself/herself as advancing in the hierarchies of the social structure. However, in Freire’s terms this sense of progress can be again seen as the false generosity of the oppressed system which maintains the oppression and prevents the awareness. And in the duration of that time taken to break the spell of the security in conformity, the endlessness of progress plays its role of unsustainability. Backed by the feeling of security, it can be traced as endlessly climbing the social ladder mainly to identify oneself as better as defined by the society but in the process losing the grip on one’s own inclinations and authentic goals.
To bring out the unsustainability caused due to the endlessness I’d want the reader to recall the picture of people commuting in the local train of Mumbai and see it along-side the case of David given by Agyeman, who is left aimless and asks him for the direction. David’s scenario can almost be superimposed on the people in train which would mean that the cramped up people in the train are very much like him as they can be seen as ones who have lost the track of their inclinations and authentic goals in the security of conformity, with the only difference that David failed to confirm and is aware of his situation. And due to their unawareness they pursue the system given goals which they believe will satisfy them but get caught in the endless ladder which in the context of this chapter is represented by the illusory hope of reaching the converging point of the parallel lines. At this point, I’d like to make a point that this unawareness extends to the choices they make and it keeps them dissatisfied as long as they stay in the conformity of the system which prescribes to them what they need. It is just like David asking what is good for me! And this combined with the limited perspective of the people results in the most commonly known idea of unsustainability i.e. lack of resources. Everybody following a common idea of a good lifestyle will only create pressure on the existing resources. Considering the hierarchies of the developed and developing nations just like the social ones in a country, I would like to bring back to the reader’s attention that if the east follows the lead of the western lifestyles, it would be environmentally catastrophic. While it may seem that the attitude coming from the limited perspective is mostly the case with developing nations, Agyeman mentions about the events occurring even in London UK that also reifies the endlessness in the progress to a good extent:

“In summer 2011, several UK cities experienced rioting and looting. Initially triggered by police shooting in Tottenham, London, these events occurred largely with no obvious political cause. Looting of fashionable clothes, sports shoes and gadgets was typical. While many stores in London’s Clapham Junction were looted, Waterstone’s bookstore was left untouched! Many
commentators have subsequently made connections with inequality and with consumerist values and identities, combining the sense of loss of other forms of value and identity with the dominance of consumerist values.” (Agyeman, 2013, p. 32)

Besides all the speculations, in particular he mentions the views given by one blogger:

*These kids aren’t rioting for the right to a job in traditional sectors threatened by neo liberalism … No, this generation is cursed with semiotic plenitude. They have been super conditioned by all kinds of powerful media and branding to think they live in a world sprinkled with stardust. A world where self-expression and recognition, not just through the medium of art (X-Factor), but via the basic interactions of their lives (Big Brother), is what essentially matters. If you don’t have the talent … then you have to buy into the lifestyle that at least evokes such stardom. When you realise you are always going to fall short of the spending power to live that lifestyle, that’s a recipe for permanent, corrosive dissatisfaction. What’s different compared to the seventies is the explosion of media – meaning the explosion of ways to get a tantalising, frustrating taste of the consumer identity you know you’ll never quite possess.* (Agyeman, 2013, p. 33)

**Conclusion**

‘Tantalizing’, as it is put by the blogger in the above piece, the word also quite efficiently encompasses the essence of the endlessness associated with the sense of progress in our context. To wrap up the chapter now, I will zoom out from the details that were built on the foundation of the parallel lines to add in the practical relevance. The unsustainability discussed in the last section gets de-camouflaged as the post-colonial oppression of India in the beginning and gets generalized towards the end under the context of endlessness, conformity and progress. While the picture of the local train illustrates the conformity practiced on a mass scale, being a part of the same mass it also explains my own attitude when I called it ‘safe’ to pursue education and music side by side. This conformity has its roots in the colonial times which reflect the history of oppression. The history discussed in the chapter includes pre and post-Independence scenario of India using Freire’s language to bring out the similarities of the two time periods and establishes

68
that the current Indian system practices the same oppressive model of the colonizer to a great extent. This is majorly witnessed as the ‘prescriptive’ attitude maintained in the several dimensions and classes of the Indian society. And, more general yet hard to realize aspect that is still present is the ‘false generosity’ disguised as progress which is conducive to maintain the oppressive system.

Now given its universal nature, talking about progress means to move from specific to a general scenario. The chapter starts with discussing about progress in a general way however, I add my personal account to bring practical relevance in the thought experiment of the parallel lines and the poem. In it, I have attempted to explain the feeling of endlessness experienced in my particular case of progress at the juncture of which, my professor gives me an indication to take into account the history\(^{38}\) of my colonial roots. Considering a move forward towards the mirage of the converging points as the endlessness of the progress, this change of direction can be seen as turning back or more like turning inward. The sense of progress however, due to its inherent nature of endlessness keeps the pursuit towards mirage going on by preventing self-awareness which ultimately causes unsustainability. This gets exemplified in the chapter through the cases of loss of valuable non-human resources, human resources and ultimately human potential. To get an illustration of this phenomenon, I would like the reader to go back to the significance of Diya and place it on the context of the parallel lines. That way it would imply that if a person is compared to a Diya then s/he is so caught up to stay in the system that s/he is totally blind or unaware of his/her needs which in this case is the very oil to keep them alive and in terms of the parallel it means that s/he cannot turn back. The crux of the argument in the chapter is to show how people are pursuing goals which are disguised as self-given but in true nature are

\(^{38}\) Freire’s phenomenological approach to take history into account.
inauthentic. With all that being said, the question that remains is, “how does one turn back amidst the pull of the progress that is so strong and blinding.
Chapter 3: Dialogue

“There is something very humane about turning back than there is in always looking forward.”

What is the significance of turning back in the context of this thesis? To get an idea, I would ask the reader to recall the poem introduced in the beginning of the chapter 2. It is shown in it that the act of turning back occurs when the subject realizes the completion of the goal which results in going back to the starting point i.e. the point when and where the goal was formed\(^\text{39}\). However, considering the case of the parallel lines, the goal (the converging lines) can be seen as something that was already given rather than having been formed by oneself. In chapter 2, I’ve tried to show, in general, how caught up people are in the hope of the convergence perpetuated by the idea of progress that efficiently hides its *endlessness*, and as a result of which are rendered unaware of the self-caused harm and the *unsustainable lifestyle*. This endless pursuit I’ve argued is the pre-condition of being human which can be depicted as facing the mirage of convergence.

Now, establishing that the goals we follow in pursuing the mirage are *inauthentic*, given that they are not self-made, how then does one form an authentic goal? I argue that it is indeed in turning back that one initiates the process of authenticity and thus is even able to choose the sustainable goal. To build the argument, I shall continue in the context of the parallel lines and eventually attempt to find its practical applications and thus, complete the project of describing how to move from an unsustainable lifestyle to a sustainable one.

\(^{39}\) It says in the poem, “I look down, them I see and them I want to be, Told my friends, I am on the way to them” wherein the starting point refers to the friends because it’s with them the narrator forms his goal.
To form an idea about authentic goals let us discuss a bit using the ongoing examples of this thesis i.e. of illusions and mirage. The human pre-condition to be caught in the mirage is very much like literally seeing one for e.g. seeing a bent pencil in a glass of water. When one understands the logic behind it and that it is an illusion being human, no more does anyone fall prey to its sight. Furthermore, one comes to know something new about oneself for e.g. in this case the limitations about human vision.

Now going back to the context of the parallel lines using the pencil example will shed light on some other aspects associated with it. The simple example of facing a bent stick involves the process of realization which in the case of facing a convergence doesn’t occur so easily. That is primarily because while caught in the hope of progress, one doesn’t even encounter it as anything unusual like the illusion of the bent stick wherein something already looks notably different to enable an action. And the very action to understand the phenomenon becomes self-given because unlike pursuing the convergence this action that I give/take myself shows that one is already aware and trying to understand vs. just accepting what others say is the case. And since one is aware before acting, the very action of understanding the phenomenon is performed out of responsibility unlike pursuing the convergence because in the latter one is acting for the reasons given to him/her which is different from the former where one doesn’t know what s/he is about to find. Now the question that one needs to ask is how one becomes aware of the convergence as an illusion in the wake of false sense of progress and the endlessness of that illusion. In other words, how does one get a sense of ethical responsibility?

40 Just like the view of the earth from the moon
41 This has to do with the process of perceptual comparison that happens phenomenologically
It may sound that the encounter for one to get to a self-given action has to be something abstract like being able to spot a difference between a bent pencil and a straight one however, it’s the obviousness of the phenomenon that needs to be brought to attention. For e.g. Apples always fall on the ground when they are ripe but it was only to Newton the phenomenon appeared to be something worth understanding. Another example to make it more relevant is Gandhi’s encounter with racism when he was removed from a first class compartment and thrown out of the train because of his racial identity. While it was not uncommon for Indians to face racism in Colonial South Africa, it was only Gandhi who didn’t want to conform to that kind of system; hence he questioned it and then changed it. Besides obviousness what else is common in both the examples is the context. The phenomenon of something as obvious as ‘things falling down’ was relevant in Newton’s context because of his previous engagement in understanding natural phenomenon. Similarly Gandhi could see through the obvious also because of his context of colonialism and given that he was a lawyer. Also, these examples reflect a sense of responsibility in them. Newton could’ve suppressed his mind boggling thought of gravity and continued his other ventures like calculus or optics and Gandhi could’ve chosen to conform to the racial discrimination or could’ve waited until the same yearning arose in other Indians.

As pointed out earlier, Freire mentions that this kind of behaviour to doubt oneself because nobody else feels the same is common before waging the struggle of freedom. Now in terms of Gandhi, the struggle of freedom almost literally makes sense as he did start a struggle against the colonial oppressors but what does it imply in Newton’s case. While the two examples seem to part ways here but to a certain extent, there is a struggle of freedom involved in Newton, which displays authenticity. In the context of science and discoveries,
I’ve showed earlier in the chapter 2 that how India since independence and in current times is engaged (if not dependent) in following western models of practicing science. This brings out the ‘freedom’ associated in Newton’s case which allows him to think differently and confidently pursue his thoughts to check if they are valid whereas a country with a colonial history even after 75 years of independence lacks originality in the aforementioned context. Although it’s an example that makes a comparison from two different eras and between discoveries in terms of fundamental science and mostly application based endeavours of current times carried out worldwide irrespective of a colonial history of a country, it is intended to only show how authenticity is affected by freedom in both the cases. Thus the freedom as such is explicitly seen and can be understood in terms of its common use in Gandhi’s struggle for freedom and, implicitly it can be understood as the underlying source for Newton to be able to look at things differently and pursue his ventures. And the struggle in Newton’s case and in his context is to stay resolute in his pursuits that in turn strengthen his freedom to continue with any future pursuits.

This way it can be inferred that process of authenticity involves a struggle of freedom that can be on the personal level as in the case of Newton and even evolve into mass level as in Gandhi’s case. Now, in the context of parallel lines both Gandhi and Newton can be seen as turning back after having their encounters in their respective contexts. For Newton it’s the sight of falling apples and being thrown out of the train for Gandhi. On the parallel lines, to turn back is to see the same image which one has been seeing and seeking in looking forward i.e. again the convergence of the lines. Now to this view, which is the encounter, one is likely to get confused, troubled, face elusiveness, feel uneasy and may wonder about its possibility which I argue should make one inquire about it. This is the inquiry that both Newton and Gandhi did upon their
encounters which makes them understand their relationship with the world. As mentioned in the chapter 2 this in the language of Freire is called Concientization\textsuperscript{42}. Again the process of Concientization is apparent in case of Gandhi as after his encounter he gets aware of his position in terms of accesses and social class which differed from what was given to him. While in case of Newton it can be seen as becoming aware of one’s position in terms of natural phenomena\textsuperscript{43} which might not affect one as directly as in the case of the former but it does give a knowledge which is new (as it brought new relations in the laws of physics), self-given and even useful for everyone in the context (which can be the scientific community).

Now what makes this whole process of transformation an “act of turning back” is the fact that when they start their inquiry what they come to understand pertains to a (different relation)/ (different way) of looking at what has already happened i.e. in terms of the history. So in Gandhi’s case, the revelation was that the law worked differently for him than how it was supposed to be, which involved turning back to what he already knew i.e. the laws that should have allowed him to be in the first class coach of the train and comparing it with his current situation. For Newton it was also the laws of physics that had a relation in the existing laws that were never seen like the way he saw it. For Heidegger it’s only when something interrupts that ‘mindless’ acceptance of the previous paradigm that we are ‘forced’ to consider a different perspective, that is, we ‘turn back.’ In Newton’s case, the apple fell, in Gandhi’s case; he was thrown out of his first-class seat that he paid for.

\textsuperscript{42} It begins with the individual person becoming aware of her own social context, political context, economic context, gender, social class, sexuality, and race and how these play an important role in the shaping of her reality. The process of conscientização also entails becoming aware of our agency to choose and create our reality

\textsuperscript{43} A better example to understand this point can be the discovery of the heliocentric model as it literally shows one’s position in the world which differs from the views that existed then.
However, often, especially in current times it can be difficult to acknowledge one’s own encounter which in simple words mean that it might not be easy to make sense of one’s own experiences. At this juncture I’d like to add my own example where my *encounter* with the endlessness (as described in the chapter 2) was brought to my knowledge when my thesis advisor Jules Simon asked me to find out about my colonial history. To be specific he asked me “where do the railroads come from?” referring to the comparison of the parallel lines which is also the basis of the whole thesis. This is how he helped me to call into question the *obviousness* of the situation. So this way my *inquiry* about the colonial history of my country which is also my *responsibility* became a consequence of my moment of turning back which helped me to understand my experiences of endlessness. And this moment in the process of my transformation is called having a *dialogue* which is also the moment of breaking the pattern of endlessness, etc. According to Freire,

“Dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world. By naming the world what Freire means is that to arrive at an understanding of the world, which is mediated by the two people, in an authentic way. What this implies is that the world one lives in can be transformed. (Freire, 2014, p. 88)

“If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings. Dialogue is thus an existential necessity. And since dialogue is the encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be transformed and humanized, this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person’s ‘depositing’ ideas in another. (Freire, 2014, p. 88)

The two important points that I would like to focus on from the above piece are first, that after engaging in a dialogue one may reach a significance of their existence and the second one is that the dialogue cannot be reduced to depositing ideas in another. Another few aspects which he considers necessary to have a dialogue and will in turn help me establish relevance to my own case are that there needs to be an epistemological curiosity, conviviality and critical thinking.
Now going back to the Dialogue that I had with Jules Simon, definitely involved curiosity given that he is my thesis adviser after all however, it also involved conviviality for both of us because despite of having a hierarchical relationship I was sharing my experiences with him and he was patient enough to reflect and act on it by asking me questions about it. However his question didn’t strike me as relevant in the first instance as I didn’t understand what role does the colonial history of my country has to play in a thesis on Sustainability. This is why it involved a critical thinking where I had to do an inquiry to explore his question and as a result of which I was able to understand my experiences of what I call endlessness which have brought significance to my life. This I understand as my self-given goal. And the whole process where I had a dialogue which made me do an inquiry can also be seen as a process of Concientization in Freire’s terms. Although I might have not been actively engaged in understanding my socio-economic and political context however I argue that it involved becoming aware of my historical context which indirectly gave me an understanding of the former.

The political decision initiated by Nehru to promote engineering as education directly shaped the economics and hence the social factors of the country. The first big project towards industrialization was started in Bhopal which also happens to be my hometown. The way it shaped the socio-economic factors can be explained through migration of people to this town who settled here to work in the industry and my father being a part of it as well. It’s beyond the scope of my thesis to do a sociological survey to understand how such a big industry shapes the socio economic factors of an area but one shouldn’t be surprised to know that in the high school that I went to, which also happens to be funded by the same industry, most of my batch mates opted to pursue engineering as their career. This tells me where my conformity (or the idea of ‘safety’ as I referred to my decision in Chapter 2) with the normal trend comes from because as
a matter of fact while growing up with friends who chose that path, I was under the same impression and even believed that I was going to be an engineer.

At this juncture, I would like to mention a quote from Freire which says, “How can the oppressed, as divided, unauthentic beings, participate in developing the pedagogy of their liberation? Only as they discover themselves to be "hosts" of the oppressor can they contribute to the midwifery of their liberating pedagogy. As long as they live in the duality in which to be is to be like and to be like is to be like an oppressor, this contribution is impossible.” (Freire, 2014, p. 48) What needs to be clarified is that the oppressor in my case is no more the colonizer but the post-colonial structure of the Indian society about which I’ve argued in the 2nd Chapter that it maintains similar structures of oppression. This results in the duality because of which the oppressed always seeks to follow the oppressor’s ways which in my case was the conformity with the popular career trend in my city. In reference to my concern that how the colonial history of my country relates to a thesis on sustainability, this shows, to what extent can it influence the decision making, homogenize the choice and ultimately limit the perspective of the individuals.

Having explained where the context of my conformity comes from, I would like to point that this process over a long period of time affects not only one’s ability to understand their experiences but also makes one dependable to anyone or everyone but him/herself. This is clearly exemplified through Agyeman’s testimony about his student David as he failed to understand what he was good at and was rendered dependent on Agyeman to guide him for his future. Similarly, in my case, as mentioned in the 2nd chapter, I was not able to understand my experiences of endlessness because not only my then perspective was not helping me to understand it but at the same time pushed me to keep going forward. And the motivation to keep going forward to the endlessness of the parallel lines was fostered by the idea of progress which
is much like Freire’s argument of *To be is to be like* and to be like the social identities marketed by the society. This social identity in my case which is most commonly well revered in India is studying abroad. While the social identity came with its benefits and fun but I argue that it does expire and that is what led to the unexplainable experiences which I refer as endlessness. Since I couldn’t understand I kept doing the same things over and over to get to my previous mind set which would entertain those amusements. And that’s when the endlessness plays its role which analogically can be seen like going towards Mars when the resources are exhausted on Earth and so on.

However, the dialogue I had with my advisor plays an important role as it helped me to widen my perspective. I would like to emphasize on the point that my perspective is ‘widened’ as compared to that I have a ‘different’ perspective to understand my situation. As Freire argues that, “since dialogue is the encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be transformed and humanized, this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person’s “depositing” ideas in another”. It would’ve been easier for my advisor to just tell me where my experiences of endlessness are rooted and being a student of philosophy I would’ve have even agreed to it however, it involved effort on both of our parts where I had to do an inquiry to understand its relevance which then went beyond the scope of this thesis and extended to me on the personal level and for him, in my understanding, it involved controlling his urge to directly tell me how the colonial history has shaped me as an Indian. I argue this way he avoided depositing ideas which is why I can also safely argue that it doesn’t make me dependent on him.

Another argument that Freire makes is that the oppressed has a fragmented understanding of the reality. He writes, “when people lack a critical understanding of their reality; apprehending it in
fragments which they do not perceive as interacting constituent elements of the whole, they cannot truly know that reality.” (Freire, 2014, p.104). I argue that the lack of critical understanding is a consequence of depositing different ideas to understand different experiences of reality. The deposited ideas don’t allow people to be critical as there is a dependency on the depositor who could be an individual or the system. Relating this to my case, my experience of endlessness initially seemed to me as something separate and more like a hindrance to keep going forward. However, the critical inquiry that resulted after the dialogue helped me deconstruct my perspective and understand that my experiences are not just a reaction to something that I don’t understand but also inertia of my past. While I cannot claim that I don’t perceive my reality in parts anymore but it would be safe to say I have an understanding of why and what I was looking forward to.

**Conclusion**

To conclude the chapter and hence the project, I would now relate the above given argument of Freire to the first chapter of my thesis. I argue that the common approaches discussed to address the problem of sustainability suffers the problem of fragmented understanding of the reality which initially helps to control the situation but always manifests in unknown and mostly unfavourable ways. As it was realized that there is a cost associated with the progress such as that from industrialization, new discoveries were made which resulted in putting environment as the centre of concern. And the availability of resources became a concern as well, as soon as the patterns of human consumption were noticed. While, as history tells that this has been a common
concern for every civilization that existed, the question that should be asked is how we as a part of the current civilization can do to address it.

Although, the measures taken to deal with the above mentioned problems are helpful and even necessary, the reason I argue they display a fragmented understanding of the world is because they are the immediate reaction to the problem that becomes visible which doesn’t address the inertia of the ongoing lifestyle and eventually works to maintain it. For instance as mentioned in the first chapter, in reaction to the concern of lack of resources, the economic efficiency on one side promotes technological development that works towards efficient use of resources but on the other it covertly maintains the distribution of the resources. While it definitely becomes useful and definitely recommendable to use such a technology but the motivation behind such a research maintains inequality. And the reason inequality tantamount to unsustainability is that it ultimately drives competitive consumption. (Agyeman, 2013) This way the very effort taken to address the problem, for what is visible and understood, only holds it off and is seen as progress but in the long run augments the inertia of the very same problem which leads to the progress trap.

It is true of human nature that you learn something new when something goes wrong. The knowledge that environment is not only meant to conquer but also an important part and not separate from humans was only realized when its costs were faced. In other words when you fall on the ground you learn what was wrong. However, the choice comes when you want to just put a band aid on that wound and keep running the same way or you learn what is it in your running style that can be improved not just to avoid falling but instead getting better at it. Now the argument that I’ve made in the 2nd chapter discusses why exactly one is not able to check his/her running style but is instead inclined to only to heal their wound and keep going. However, if
there exists a band aid, it makes complete sense to use it just like it is recommendable to use a house appliance that consumes less electricity. And gradually as the wound heals the runner can choose to learn about his/her running style to get better at it. So what does this move looks like in dealing with the problem of sustainability? Using this logic I would argue that alternate sources of energy like solar power, nuclear power, water or battery driven cars can only be seen as advanced band aids or just making the ground better to run.

So as long as the humanity continues to understand the external world and the interconnectedness and infinite relations which are yet to be discovered to only keep dealing with the problems such as that of limits of resources, I argue world will only seem as a problem that needs to be dealt with so much so that even when something good knocks your door you don’t want to open it like Plato’s cavemen. When you become used to sit by the window just like the picture of the kid who is convinced to be in the system so there will always be a window to look out you, tend to forget there is a door. More so in the current times when that window is a Microsoft Windows that keeps you glued to the infinite view, giving no good reason to even look for a door except that of a fridge that again works to keep you locked in the room and keep looking through the window. So why would one in the first place even leave that window? The only reason to leave it (just like how the kid is convinced) would be to do everything to ensure that it is there. Since there is homogenization and everyone is on the same path the interaction with anyone would be to work out the ways to preserve the windows. So what if there is one window which everyone talks about but only few are able to reach it. The legend it would go with can be that it is the only real...
window. That window can be assumed as the one in the top floor of any of the high rise building from Figure 12. Now there are two possibilities about the person who reaches that house- First, due to the constant effort to only preserve the windows even after reaching there one may only do more and more to preserve it, second, if one remembers to look out of it and does so, s/he will slowly enjoy the view for a while and gradually learn about his/her own journey. Suppose the view is so overlooking and wide that s/he spots the starting point of their journey. Although the starting point is way is in the outskirts of the city but s/he learns that it experiences the same sunlight which is in his/her current location.

What I intend to explain through this hypothetical scenario is that due to the limited perspective which results from homogenization, one may even forget that they’ve reached their goal and strive towards making more which in this case could be to make the building taller and taller. But if s/he somehow manages to take a look out through the window something will happen that can totally change his/her concerns, perspective and break the pattern of endlessness. This is the encounter which I’ve argued earlier that is becoming more and more difficult to address. Now, to continue in the language of this scenario, if this person were to go down and tell those hundreds of people directly like Plato’s cavemen then, s/he might as well end up dying or if not that then it would be a futile act to liberate them this way. This is what Freire would call as depositing ideas. However, if Plato’s liberated cavemen, instead of telling his fellow cavemen directly chose to share his truth through the language of shadows the outcome could’ve be different. This shows that with Freedom comes choice. Similarly, the one who has seen the view from that special window puts an effort to translate his experience through the language of the window the outcome can be different. To relate this scenario to my case I see that the Dialogue played a crucial role, because having read my experiences and the analogy that I used to express my
experiences, Jules Simon maintained it for me when he related the parallel lines to the history of rail road tracks.

Going back to the analogy of parallel lines, the move of being able to look out of the special window equals to turning back. And realizing that it was the sunlight that was the gift, the gift that you always possessed only tells that you have come to know something new about yourself. This in the parallel lines means realizing that you have reached the goal and that goal made you turn back to face the convergence again. Because no matter how tall the building is, the parallel lines will always be infinite and endless and the convergence will not cease to appear until one turns back to discover the truth about them. What this entails which is important to get back to the concern of sustainability is that the convergence/endlessness will always be there but if one learns to accept the truth, it will become easier to let go of what appears. Another point to avoid the problem of homogenization is to have a diversity whose goals are different. It is through this diversity, if one engages in the dialogue, then through critical understanding one may understand the fragments to be able to understand the whole and ultimately widen the perspective. For instance, as I mentioned my dialogue with Jules Simon on hand is to someone who is in the same field but on the other it is also a dialogue between a student and a professor.

Finally, going back to the problem of world seeming as only a problem to be dealt with, just like the runner who chooses to keep discovering better band aids, better shoes or bettering the running ground, over a long period of time one will tend to forget what even was the concern much like how one may forget to look out of that special window. Similarly, to relate this with my inquiry of Indian scenario, much like the band aids the tools of progress like the railways, the language and the culture, if they are not critically inquired about, one may never realize what its purpose was and how much has it become yours so that you don’t work to preserve it as a
fragment just like the window but learn to understand its role in the whole and finally your make your own authentic goals.
CH 1

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Vita

I finished my Bachelor of the Arts in Philosophy from Wilson College, Mumbai, India in 2015. With the help and support of my mentors there I was able to come to the US and pursue MA at the University of Texas at El Paso. Since the fall of 2015 my experience as a graduate student has been a special ride. From moving to a new country, to a border city with a rich Hispanic culture, to an altogether different academic environment I’ve had a plethora of experiences in last 4 years. On academic front, as a graduate student it involved writing more than a dozens of papers, a thesis and grading more than 500 essays as a Teaching Assistant. However, what came along with the hard work is the ability to articulate my thoughts and communicate effectively. This happened as a result of countless weekly meetings with my advisor, discussions with the fellow grad students about a topic and numerous students who visited during office hours when they needed help with a topic or an essay. Besides everything pertaining to academia, my new goal is to find and learn about other fragments of life and build bridges between them.

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