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The Memory of Hiroshima and the Controversy over Nuclear Weapons in India

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1.
A few hours before the first atomic bomb detonated in the desert of New Mexico on July 16, 1945, its designer Robert Oppenheimer presented his collaborators with a few lines from the Bhagavadgita, the "Divine Song" from Indian mythology, in his own translation. "In battle, in the forest, on the edge of a mountain cliff, on the dark ocean, [...] in sleep, in confusion, in the depths of shame, man is saved by the good deeds he has done in the past."[1] The scientists were in a state of extreme tension. They did not know whether the bomb would set the atmosphere on fire and all of New Mexico would blow to pieces, or even the entire world.

Oppenheimer, before becoming a physicist, had studied Sanskrit at Berkeley, and during the preparations for the bomb explosion, there was always an old copy of the Hindu sacred text on his desk. In the Bhagavadgita, part of the sixth book of the Mahabharata, the epic poem about the war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, Vasudeva (who is Lord Krishna, the eighth incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu), in the aftermath of the battle of Kurukshetra, explains to Arjuna, the hero of the Pandavas, his duty as a warrior to take up arms against the Kauravas, even if some of his relatives and friends were among them: "But if you refuse to fight this righteous battle, you will certainly sin by failing in your duty and will lose your reputation as a warrior." (Bhagavad-gita, II, 33)

When, three weeks after the successful test, the bomb was dropped on the population of two large Japanese cities, the justification was based in particular on the hope that the limited use of extreme violence could put an end to the violence of the War and save the lives of many soldiers, not only American, but also Japanese, and many civilians.

The Bhagavadgita contains a lesson on the ethics of the warrior (the *kshatriya*). But other ways of salvation are also discussed in it - (such as meditation, knowledge, sacrifice, etc.).[2] Not all ways were open to the warrior of the myth: "It is better to perform one's own duty, even if imperfectly, than to perform the duty of another. It is better to fail or die in performing one's duty than to perform the duty of another, for to follow the path of another is dangerous." (Bhagavadgita, III, 35)

For many Indians today, the Bhagavadgita is the fundamental text of moral orientation. For Mahatma Gandhi, too, it had become a source of inspiration, especially the idea of the selfless fulfillment of duty. In the words of Krishna: "You have a right to perform your prescribed duties, but not to enjoy the fruits of action." (Bhagavadgita, II, 47)[3] Gandhi tried to make the commandment of selflessness, in the sense of altruism, coincide with the doctrine of non-violence or *ahimsa* and arrived at a form of conflict resolution completely different from that of the use of physical force. To resolve conflicts, one did not need the force of arms, according to Gandhi, but *satyagraha*: soul force or "force of truth," the insistence on the truth of law or of a consensus. To

1 Quoted in:Theo Sommer, "Entscheidung in Potsdam", in: *Die Zeit*, 21 July 2005.
2 The philosophies and ways of salvation that can be deduced from the *Bhagavadgita*, in fact, are so diverse that the comments of experts rarely coincide with regard to its central message.
3 Also: "One must act out of duty, therefore, and be detached from the Fruits of actions, because by acting without attachment one reaches the Supreme." (*Bhagavadgita*, III, 19) The quotations are taken from the Italian version of the Vidya Bharata website: www.vedanta.it/sastra/bhagavad_gita/bhagavad_gita.htm.

insist firmly, but without violence. This is a method of struggle that does not inflict suffering on the other but, through the readiness to accept suffering for oneself, seeks to effect a change in the attitude and way of acting in the other: "a method by which men, by enduring suffering, secure their rights."[4]

It is the acclaimed historical significance of India's non-violent resistance against colonial power that leads to the question of how Indians today remember Hiroshima, the symbol of destruction and extreme violence. Is it possible to connect the memory of non-violent resistance in India and the commemoration of the dead of Hiroshima in such a way as to open up an alternative perspective to the inevitable increase in nuclear confrontations? And how have Indians themselves assimilated the two historical experiences (the one directly experienced and the other observed from afar) into their political decisions?

2.
A look at the reality of India and South Asia today immediately destroys all illusions. India, after achieving independence, abandoned the policy of non-violence, faught three wars against Pakistan, one against China and, starting in the 1970s, launched its own nuclear weapons program. In 1998, from May 11 to 13, India completed this program with a series of tests in Pokhran in the desert of Rajasthan, followed by those of Pakistan on May 26, and declared itself a nuclear power. The country, which had played a forerunner role in decolonization throughout the world and, thanks to the example of Gandhi and his followers, had achieved a particular moral authority, today claims to be recognized above all as a military power. South Asia, with the conflict in Kashmir that has been dragging on for half a century, is seen by experts as one of the most likely places for a nuclear war to break out.

This is not the place to reconstruct India's defense policy and analyze the security needs of the country with all its reasons and details. The focus of the following is the question of how historical memory intervenes in the gradual transformation of India's attitude to nuclear rearmament.

As a contemporary witness, Gandhi had expressed a certain foreboding about the mental effects that the destructive action could have: on the perpetrators as well as on the victims. It was a year after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that Gandhi first spoke out in public. Addressing the hopes entertained by supporters of the bombing, he said: "The view of some American friends was that the atomic bomb would bring about *ahimsa* (non-violence) more effectively than any other method." Yes, he admitted, perhaps through the nausea it will cause, but nausea is usually not long-lasting. "The world will revert to violence once the effect of nausea has worn off." The atomic bomb has stunned the noblest feelings that have sustained mankind for so many centuries. For the time being the result has been the destruction of the soul of Japan. To understand what has happened to the soul of the destructive nation, it is still too early. Violence cannot be destroyed by counter-violence. Humanity can escape violence only through non-violence."[5]

4 Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, edited by Anthony J. Parel, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 90n. It was against the use of violence in the anti-colonial resistance movement that Gandhi stressed his interest "in discovering in it [the *Bhagavadgita*] *ahimsa* and not *himsa*, as so many these days try to do." Address to the students of Tiruppur, October 23, 1927, in: *The Essential Writings of Mahat ma Gandhi*, edited by Raghavan Iyer, Oxford University Press, Delhi 1993, pp. 69f. *Himsa* is the Sanskrit word for the use of force, *ahimsa* is the negation of the same which, in positive expression, also means "love." "In the application of *satyagraha* I discovered from the first moments that the search for truth does not allow the use of violence against the adversary, but that the latter must be diverted from error by patience and understanding." Gandhi, quoted in: Gianni Sofri, *Gandhi e l'India*, Giunti, Florence 1995, p. 62. The criticism of the interpretation of the concept of *karma* or work or action obviously also implies the attempt, in 1945, to legitimate the use of the atomic bomb with the ethics of the *Bhagavdgita*.

5 Speech given in Poona in July 1946, cit. in Kai Bird and Lawrence Lifschultz (eds.), *Hiroshima's Shadow. Writings on the Denial of History and the Smithsonian Controversy*, Pamphleteer's Press, Stony Creek, Conn. 1998, pp. 258ff.

A few weeks later, Gandhi confirmed his assessment and referred to the danger that lay in the reckless use of scientific research: “I consider that the use of the atomic bomb for the destruction of men, women and children en masse is the most diabolical use of science.”[6] The third time that Gandhi spoke of Hiroshima, a week before his death in January 1948, he seemed to anticipate the new confrontation of the Cold War. ”As it is, the war ended disastrously and the victors are full of jealousy and desire for power. Already a third war is looming, which could prove even more disastrous. *Ahimsa* is a much stronger weapon than the atomic bomb.”[7]

With his considerations, Gandhi provided some important arguments for the peace movement in the years that followed. As time went by, in America too the thesis that the bomb had shortened the war was contested, criticizing it for the lack of reflection on possible alternatives. The most recent research confirms that it was not only a question of military necessity or respect for the lives of the soldiers.[8] Perhaps the desired effect was a completely different one. The war was an opportunity to test the destructive force of the new weapon and demonstrate it to potential adversaries of the future. And the intention to drop the bomb, at all costs, during the war, perhaps even prolonged it.

With this suspicion, the critique takes on a wider dimension. Not only does it take us away from the situation of war and emergency, but it also denounces the growing power of the “military-industrial complex” over political decisions, a danger advertised by US President Dwight D. Eisenhower in his farewell address to the nation in January 1961.[9] It confirms the dehumanising potential of scientific research that Gandhi had already hinted at.

For some Indian post-colonial critics, this calls into question the very Western rationality that industrialized countries tried to export to third world countries after the end of colonialism, as development aid. Those who were critical of the modernization and industrialization policy of Jawaharlal Nehru and the Congress Party also cultivated the memory of the victims of Hiroshima. They saw the dropping of the bomb as a symbol of a technical-scientific civilization, which is detrimental to human choices. According to sociologist of science Ashis Nandy, it reveals its misanthropy not only with its side effects, but already in the experiments. Hiroshima had been chosen as the target of the bombing precisely “because it was not a military target and had been spared from the bombs of the Allies; here the destructive capacity of the new weapon could be measured precisely. The city was chosen by militant scientists, despite the half-hearted protest of army officers, as the perfect experimental subject for research into nuclear weapons.”[10]

3.
Nandy wrote these lines in 1990, when nuclear research in India was already well advanced. It had

6 *Harijan*, September 29, 1946, in: *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi 1958-1984 (CWMG), vol. 85, p. 371.

7 *Harijan*, February 22, 1948, interview with an American journalist, CWMG, vol. 90, p. 522.

8 According to historian Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, for example, the bomb served primarily to punish the enemy Japan, both symbolically and in reality, as revenge for Pearl Harbor. Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *Racing the Enemy. Stalin, Truman and the Surrender of Japan*, The Belknap Press, Harvard 2005. Hasegawa states that “the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki played no role in the end of the war. The Japanese leaders did not care if two more cities were obliterated. What made them panic was the Red Army that had been advancing since August 8 and the danger of having the Russians as an occupying power in their country. [...] Because of Stalin’s troops, MacArthur’s invasion, originally planned, had become obsolete.” Quoted in:Bernd Greiner, “Als die Politik kapitulierte. Drei wichtige neue Bücher zum Atombombenabwurf über Hiroshima und Nagasaki”, in: *Die Zeit*, 4 August 2005.

9 Dwight D. Eisenhower, “Farewell Address”, in: *The Annals of America*, XVIII, 1961-1968 (The Burdens of World Power), Encyclopaedia Britannica, Chicago 1968, pp. 1-5.

10 Ashis Nandy, “The Other Within: The Strange Case of Radhabinod Pal's Judgment of Culpability”, in: *The Savage Freud, and other essays on possible and retrievable selves*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi 1995, p. 62.

begun even before independence with the foundation of the Atomic Research Centre by Homi Bhabha in Trombay (near Bombay) in 1946 and continued in the 1950s with the construction of an Indian research reactor aimed at the civil use of atomic energy in a country with few fossil resources for energy production. Regarding nuclear armament, the influence of Gandhi's thought was still reflected for a period in a certain hesitation of the government, which directed itself against the nuclear weapons of other countries rather than claiming possession for itself.

Indeed, one must consider, in justification of Indian policy, Nehru's initial commitment to nuclear disarmament in the world, which failed mainly because of the lack of will among the atomic powers of the time. When China (which had defeated India in the 1962 war) became an atomic power in 1964, India had hoped in vain for security guarantees from the United States, the Soviet Union or Great Britain. During the negotiations on the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), between 1966 and 1968, Indian diplomacy had pushed for a binding mechanism for nuclear disarmament for all. But the treaty, as it was then implemented, granted the five existing atomic powers a nuclear oligopoly. Although the long-term goal of the treaty was the total disarmament of all countries possessing nuclear weapons, the dismantling of the existing nuclear arsenals was neither time-bound nor monitored by international institutions. This meant that the inequality between haves and have-nots was fixed indefinitely. At this point the government of Lal Bahadur Shastri began to consider attempting a “peaceful” nuclear explosion in India. A test case for the threat to Indian sovereignty was the 1971 Indo-Pakistani war (Bangladesh secession), when the United States sent its aircraft carrier Enterprise, equipped with nuclear weapons, into the Bay of Bengal to prevent India from attacking East Pakistan. Shortly thereafter the Indira Gandhi government authorized Indian scientists to proceed with the test.

The nuclear test of May 1974 (“Operation Smiling Buddha”, the “Pokhran I”) was given enormous symbolic significance in India as a “Technology Demonstrator”, proof of its own capabilities and scientific self-sufficiency.[11] The “Peaceful Nuclear Experiment”, according to the declaration of the Indian government, had taken place without military purposes. Nevertheless, the immediate consequence was the breakdown of cooperation by Canada, from where the reactor was supplied and where the Indian plutonium had been produced, and the embargo of the United States on nuclear technology and on the supply of fuel for the Tarapur power plant, built in the 1960s with American aid. The government of Richard Nixon promoted the creation of the Nuclear Suppliers Group, the group of countries that were producers of nuclear technology or fuel. The American Nuclear Non-Proliferation Act of 1978 prohibited any cooperation in the nuclear field with states that, like India, did not accept the control of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEO).

India did not conduct any further tests for more than twenty years, and the explosion in May 1998 (“Operation Shakti” or “Pokhran II”) took the world by surprise. With these tests, India’s efforts to acquire nuclear weapons were crowned with success.[12] The reactions were, once again, the breakdown of technological cooperation and severe economic sanctions, as well as the worsening of relations with Pakistan and China.[13] At that time, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party) had just taken over the government in New Delhi and the bomb was celebrated by some as the Hindu bomb. Just as the Pakistan bomb, which exploded a few days later,

11 Christiane Hartnack, “Die Wissenschaften in Indien im 20. Jahrhundert”, in: Karin Preisendanz and Dietmar Rothermund (eds.), *Südasien in der Neuzeit. Geschichte und Gesellschaft, 1500-2000*, Promedia Verlag, Vienna 2003, p. 120.

12 For a critical assessment of the “nuclear option” achieved with the Pokhran experiments, see T. Krishna Kumar, “The Nuclear Option: Some Economic and Strategic Issues”, in: *Ecoconimc and Political Weekly*, February 6, 1999 (www.epw.org.in).

13 In the long run, however, the sanctions had only a marginal effect on the economy and technological progress in India. Within five years after Pokharan-II, most of the sanctions had ended.

was called the Islamic bomb – although one gets the impression that these names appear more frequently in Western media than in the countries themselves. In both countries, carrier missiles are given mythical or historical names. One of the Indian carrier missiles is named Agni, after the deity of cosmic and ritual fire in the Rigveda. Pakistan's medium-range missile (2,500 kilometers), which can reach practically all major Indian cities, is named Ghauri, after the Muslim hero Muhammad Ghauri who, in the twelfth century, defeated the Hindu king Prithvi Raj Chauhan. But this was the traditional custom and did not require the presence of a party of fundamentalists in power.[14]

The reaction in India after the nuclear test was one of enthusiasm, not only among the followers of the ruling party, but also in the secular parties and in the public in general. "Explosion of self-esteem," "A road to resurgence," "A moment of pride" - these were the headlines of Indian newspapers in the days after the nuclear tests. The bomb was seen as a defense against "technological colonialism" or "nuclear apartheid." Polls on the nuclear issue in India were in clear favor of the official policy of insisting on the option, but not using it. One third of the population turned out to be outspoken supporters of nuclear armament. Opponents were less than 10 percent.[15]

One of the few voices of public protest was that of Arundhati Roy, the well-known author of *The God of Small Things* and environmental activist. In an article entitled "The End of Imagination", published in the British newspaper *The Guardian*, she described the self-destructive consequences of the atomic bomb for the politics of the future. The enemy in a nuclear war would no longer be another country, but the Earth itself:

May 1998. It'll go down in history books, provided of course we have history books to go down in. Provided, of course, we have a future. [...] If only, if only nuclear war was just another kind of war. If only it was about the usual things - nations and territories, gods and histories. If only those of us who dread it are worthless moral cowards who are not prepared to die in defense of our beliefs. If only nuclear war was the kind of war in which countries battle countries, and men battle men.

But it isn't. If there is a nuclear war, our foes will not be China or America or even each other. Our foe will be the earth herself. Our cities and forests, our fields and villages will burn for days. Rivers will turn to poison. The air will become fire. The wind will spread the flames. When everything there is to burn has burned and the fires die, smoke will rise and shut out the sun. The earth will be enveloped in darkness. There will be no day - only interminable night.[16]

Some of the writer's ideas were shared by the liberal Indian public, who understood the dangers. However, even those who attended the annual public remembrance of the bombing of August 1945 felt they were faced with a dilemma between the experience of the past and the needs of the present, a dilemma they wanted to resolve in a modern, "realistic" way. As Indian journalist Rajeev Srinivasan explained: "When August 6 approaches, I think of Hiroshima […] I can only share with the protesters, especially those in Japan, the sentiment that the atomic bomb is the ultimate evil. Nevertheless, I support India's possession of the nuclear bomb, for a very simple reason. And that reason is self-preservation. The Americans dropped the atomic bombs on Japan because the Japanese were unable to repel the attack. In the only empirical case we have, a strong power was

14 What is really worrying, however, is the attempt by Pakistani scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan to sell nuclear technology to Libya, Iran and North Korea. See V. S. Arunachalam, "Proliferation and after", in: *The Hindu*, 13 February 2004.

15 See Harald Müller, *Weltmacht Indien. Wie uns der rasante Aufstieg herausfordert*, Fischer, Frankfurt/M. 2006, p. 176.

16 Arundhati Roy, "The End of Imagination", in: *The Guardian*, 1 August 1998. The article was also published in the Indian magazines *Frontline* and *Outlook*. Quoted in: https://www.commondreams.org/views/2002/03/07/end-imagination; 06/08/2025

not stopped by moral considerations. So, beware, minor powers! If you do not have a deterrent, those who do, will trample on you."[17]

4.
This is the logic of deterrence as we know it from the Cold War between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. And why shouldn't it work in South Asia as it worked in the West, that is, as a guarantor of peace? The massive protest abroad against Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests was accompanied by an air of condescension, which awakened unpleasant memories in those countries of the days of colonial paternalism and further increased the number of supporters in South Asia. "Mistrust of the ability of South Asian countries to operate a stable deterrent system is acquired by their populations almost as a racist prejudice."[18]

However, the reassurance based on the Western experience of atomic deterrence soon proved to be wrong on another issue, namely the belief that it was no longer possible (or likely) to wage conventional warfare.[19] Shortly after the tests, there was a military escalation between the two states in Kashmir which since 1949, following the first Indo-Pakistani war, has been divided along an armistice line, defined by the United Nations, later renamed as "Line of Control" (Shimla agreement 1972) and which represents the de facto border to this day.

In February 1999, armed groups from the Pakistan administered part of Kashmir crossed the border and occupied fortified mountain positions near the town of Kargil, which the Indian army usually vacated in the winter because of the extreme weather. By May, India had discovered 800 to 900 troops, probably including regular Pakistani soldiers who had taken over the positions. India deployed troops and material to the region and began an offensive ("Operation Vijay") supported by the Air Force. The difficult terrain (with positions mostly above 5,000 meters) slowed the advance of the Indian troops, but by July 11, most of the occupied positions had been recaptured. Under pressure from the American government and after talks with Bill Clinton, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was ready to withdraw the "freedom fighters" - thus implicitly approving his government's involvement in the operations that had previously been denied.

The fact that, despite weeks of shootings, no real war broke out was interpreted by many Indians as evidence that nuclear weapons would limit the conflict. Sceptics, on the other hand, were of the opinion that they had actually caused the escalation. With the discipline required by the balance of horror, it would now be easier to start fighting, which puts the discipline to the test. Although India has always ruled out using the atomic bomb first, this does not apply to Pakistan, which is trying to counteract the superiority of India's conventional troops by threatening a nuclear "first strike". Every armed conflict between the neighboring countries therefore moves on the edge of a nuclear conflict.[20]

At the height of the crisis, Arundhati Roy noted that perhaps the West's skepticism about South Asian countries was justified: "When India and Pakistan conducted their nuclear tests in 1998, even

17 Rajeev Srinivasan, "Hiroshima, Mon Amour", in: *Rediff on the Net*, 10 August 1998. www.rediff.com/news/1998/aug/10rajeev.htm

18 Müller, *Weltmacht Indien*, p. 182. He refused to accept doubts about India's sense of responsibility from those who were the only ones to have used the atomic bomb so far. E. R. Gopinath, "Nuclear climate in South Asia", in: *The Hindu*, September 6, 2005.

19 Among the supporters of this view was also the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London, which wrote in its Strategic Survey of that year: "The fact that both India and Pakistan have secretly been with atomic weapons, may be one of the reasons why neither is any longer tormented by the menacing idea of a conventional war between them." Quoted in:Theo Sommer, "Warum sollte das Gleichgewicht des Schreckens in Südasien nicht funktionieren?", in: *Die Zeit*, 21, 14 May 1998.

20 See Müller, *Weltmacht Indien*, p. 179.

those of us who were against it complained about the hypocrisy of the Western nuclear powers. Inherent in their denunciation of the tests was the notion that black people with the bomb could not be trusted. Now we are treated to the spectacle of our own governments competing to confirm that opinion."[21]

The experience of the Kargil war had lasting consequences, both for domestic and foreign policy. Thanks to the patriotic atmosphere created in India after the defeat of the enemy that came from Pakistan, the BJP won the parliamentary elections of September and October 1999 and formed, with the support of some regional parties, the government of the National Democratic Alliance, remaining in power until May 2004. As far as foreign policy is concerned, the clash in the Himalayas led to a gradual rapprochement between India and the United States, which during the hostilities had supported the Indian position, condemning Pakistan as responsible for the infiltration of terrorists in Kashmir. The American war on terrorism, launched after September 11, 2001, also gave a boost to the improvement of India-US relationships.

India, for its part, had already shown itself to be more flexible in its approach to nuclear rearmament controls and no longer rejected the "Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty" and the NPT altogether. Although the Indian government did not sign these treaties, it declared a voluntary moratorium on further tests. The rapprochement process continued even after the May 2004 elections, which brought the Congress party, along with its allies from the United Progressive Alliance, back to power. Building on the "Next Steps in the Strategic Partnership Programme" of January 2004 between the two states, signed by the BJP government, the negotiations led to the "New Framework for the U.S.-India Defense Relationship" in June 2005 and, in July 2005, to a nuclear treaty, which ensured the supply of enriched uranium to India for civilian use. With this, the US reversed its decades-long policy of non-proliferation.[22] Although India was to place a portion of its nuclear facilities (civilian reactors) under the control of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), its military facilities remained outside its control.[23] With this, the Americans made a clear exception to the rules of the NPT (making it irrelevant), which meant full recognition of India as a nuclear power.[24]

Of course, the message to other nuclear rearmament aspirants is a devastating one: if you just show the rest of the world a fait accompli, you will be accepted into the game of the great powers.

5.

In the context of the nuclear weapons issue, the Indians paid special attention to the position of Japan. It was understood that the only country against which nuclear weapons had been used was

21 Arundhati Roy, "Summer Games With Nuclear Bombs", in: *Frontline*, 8 June 2002. Other critical essays contains the volume by M.V. Ramana and C. Rammanohar Reddy (eds.), *Prisoners of the Nuclear Dream*, Orient Longman, New Delhi 2002. A more optimistic rating is presented by Rajesh Rajagopalan, *Second Strike. Arguments about Nuclear War in South Asia, Penguin Books India*, New Delhi 2005.

22 See Siddharth Varadarajan, "Less than allies, more than partners", in: *The Hindu*, 16 May 2006.

23 On the US-India agreements of the summer of 2005 and on the intervention of the Indian nuclear scientists community in the debate on the agreement with the USA, see Michelguglielmo Torri, "Le ambizioni di grande potenza dell'India", in: Michelguglielmo Torri (ed.), *L'Asia negli anni del drago e dell'elefante 2006-2007. L'ascesa di Cina e India, le tensioni nel continente e il mutamento degli equilibri globali*, Guerini, Milan 2007. On India's nuclear policy and the tests of 1974 and 1998 see also Michelguglielmo Torri, *Storia dell'India*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 2000, pp. 690 ff., 768 ff.

24 While the American motive is to make India one of its allies, Indian nuclear scientists continue to denounce the danger of a growing dependence of the Indian atomic industry on the American one. See the appeal of nine nuclear scientists to members of Parliament on the occasion of Indian Independence Day, in: *The Hindu*, August 15, 2006. See also: Siddharth Varadarajan, "Defence Pact with the U.S.: India entering risky territory", in: *The Hindu*, July 1 2005; P.K. Iyengar, "Controversy over the nuclear deal", in: *The Hindu*, May 31, 2007; M.R. Srinivasan, "The India-U.S. nuclear stalemate", in: *The Hindu*, 31 May 2007.

the most intolerant of proliferation, especially in the Asian space. However, it was with great surprise that the harsh reaction of the Tokyo government to the 1998 nuclear tests was noted, which had immediately become the main advocate for international sanctions against India and Pakistan.

This surprise, in turn, necessitates some reflection on the politics of memory. In India, there had always been noted a certain inconsistency or ambivalence in Japan's attitude, not only because it had placed itself under the military protection of the Americans and their nuclear weapons. The decision of the Japanese, as victims of nuclear bombs, to abstain from atomic armament was also in contrast with the historical image that Indians once had formed of modern Japan. After its military victory against Russia in 1905, Japan had become a symbol of an Asian resurgence, and this had also inspired the Indian independence movement. What convinced the more conservative-minded among Indian nationalists, in particular, was the ability of the Japanese to make technological progress coincide with fidelity to their own tradition.[25]

And it is true that, in Japan itself, alongside the mourning for the dead of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, there was also the determination to overcome the inferiority vis-à-vis the West. Japanese anger after the war was directed not only against the Americans as perpetrators, but also "against their government, for having involved them in a suicidal war with a technologically superior nation armed with atomic bombs. The nuclear bomb, in this sense, became a symbol not only of the victimization but also of the inferiority of Japan. This way of seeing things spurred both the peace movement in Japan and the Japanese effort to create a technologically superior economy."[26]

The reconstruction of Japanese industry after the war was a shining example for Indians struggling to reconstruct their economy after the end of colonialism. But to the determined modernists among them it only seemed logical to also aim for nuclear armament, otherwise they risked becoming victims, as Japan had in the past. Western criticism of Indian backwardness once again evoked the memory of the colonialist humiliation, which they wanted to overcome with the possession of the bomb. The bomb was also seen in India as a sign of regained sovereignty over its own history.[27]

And the fact that the Indians, with their assessment of the situation, were not completely wrong was highlighted when, in line with the international community, the Japanese also suspended sanctions after three years and began an institutionalized security dialogue with India.[28]

To better understand India's stance on nuclear rearmament, despite its sensitivity to Hiroshima, one should have a look at the United States and its own relationship with the past. Hiroshima, like Auschwitz, has become a metaphor all over the world for the victims of extreme violence. Both

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25 There were, however, also critical voices such as that of Rabindranath Tagore, who was of the opinion, the Japanese were borrowing the history of another people, and who advised Indians not to do the same. Tagore, *Nationalism*, Rupa, Calcutta 1992, pp. 83f.

26 Michael J. Hogan, quoting an observation by John W. Dower, in: Michael J. Hogan (ed.), *Hiroshima in History and Memory*, Cambridge University Press, New York 1996, p. 7.

27 See Vinay Lal, *The History of History. Politics and Scholarship in Modern India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi 2003, p. 22. It should be added that in Japan, too, defense policy is changing. According to guidelines, in force since December 2004, it is planned "to participate in the US anti-missile program. […] The country is planning to participate more in international missions and is discussing 'preemptive strikes'. In some circles, nuclear weapons are even being considered. Japan has the fissile material and the technical know-how. If its political class were to come to the conclusion that the American protective shield was not enough, it could create its own – provided it could convince the voters." Gero von Randow, "Neue Säbel in Fernost", in: *Die Zeit*, 21 April 2005.

28 "By the second half of 1999, the Japanese approach towards India's nuclear policy appeared to be undergoing a reassessment. […] The sanctions were not yielding the desired results." S. Jaishankar, "India-Japan relations after Pokhran II", in: *Seminar* 487, March 2000. For the more recent developments see Sultan Shahin, "India, Japan eye new axis", in: *Asia Times*, 24 August 2004.

metaphors are now part of the global language of memory policy - just as Gandhi's India has become a symbol of non-violence. Experience shows, however, that these metaphors can be used by supporters of the policy of nuclear deterrence and, more recently, of military intervention, as well as by the peace movement.[29] Perhaps this is what Gandhi was thinking when he spoke of the effects of the bomb on the soul of the perpetrator who, in the end, would think only in categories of terror.

The reflections within the peace movement on the danger of destruction of the entire world for alleged security reasons, often meets with a resistance among Americans that is based precisely on the historical success of their own democracy.[30] As the American psychiatrist Robert J. Lifton wrote after the revelation of torture practices by American soldiers during the Iraq war: "The American experience is devoid of a tradition of admitting wrongdoing or serious error."[31] With this statement, Lifton refers to a common mechanism of repressing one's own guilt and seeing oneself as the victim. An extreme example for the strategy of the inversion of suffering (*Leidensverkehrung*) in the American remembrance of Hiroshima is presented in the film "Mission Of The Shark" (USA 1991). In July 1945, the American ship "Indianapolis" was sunk, after transporting parts of the atomic bombs for Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The film shows the hard struggle for the survival of the naval crew and the unjust conviction of Captain Charles McVay, used by the U.S. Navy as a scapegoat. The film tries to show, in the context of the bombing of Hiroshima, the American suffering, after the attack with torpedoes by the Japanese. Exemplary of the lack of compassion and remorse regarding Hiroshima, the inventor of the hydrogen bomb, Edward Teller, in his book *The Legacy of Hiroshima* (1962) briefly remarked: "Rational behavior is based on the courage to employ nuclear weapons, when tactics require it."[32]

Perhaps, today, a comparable mechanism is at work in India. With the difference that here the inversion of suffering is not necessary. In World War II, Indians participated only in a subordinate role, as soldiers in the British army, not as real protagonists. The experience of suffering during colonialism, on the other hand, is real. And in independent India, sensitivity to neocolonial discrimination remains, as shown by the West's reaction to India and Pakistan, a political force not to be underestimated. In contrasting one's own role as victim and the other's role as perpetrator, there lies a problematic potential, which stuns the feeling of the fallibility of one's own action.

Gandhi had made suffering a method of struggle against foreign power, not in the sense of stimulating aversion and physical strength (*himsa*), but to evoke empathy, reflection and the will to compromise in the adversary. He was sure that – in view of the future world – the renunciation of violence was superior to weapons of war. Unlike Gandhi, the supporters of Hindu nationalism have transformed the Indian experience of suffering into a means, which does not serve reconciliation and the search for consensus with the other, but the imposition of their own power. By stylizing India as an eternal innocent victim of foreign aggressors,[33] they try to give legitimacy to the

29 "No more genocide, no more Auschwitz", this was how participation in the Kosovo war was justified in Germany (and elsewhere).

30 Here I follow the interpretation of Peter Bürger, "Nach Hiroshima blieb ein Lernprozess der Zivilisation aus", in: *Telepolis*, 31 July 2005.

31 Quoted in: Bürger, "Nach Hiroshima".

32 Quoted in: Bürger, "Nach Hiroshima". Clint Eastwood's two films *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima*, however, demonstrate that the taboo can also be overcome. And, obviously, the American attitude is also favored by the Japanese attempt to exploit the suffering of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to suppress the memory of its own war crimes and the sense of guilt. The lack of a critical approach to Japanese imperialism that, towards the end of the war, was sloshing up to the door of India, also reflects the sensitivities in India. See Brij Tankha, "Remembering Hiroshima and Nagasaki", in: *Frontline*, August 13, 2005. According to the historian of the University of Delhi the Asian dimension of the war and the suffering of the peoples subjugated by Japan is underestimated in the discussion on the memory of Hiroshima.

33 Among these are not only the British colonialists but also, and above all, the Muslim rulers. According to the Indian

discrimination and exclusion of ethnic and religious minorities.

The most striking example, in recent times, of a vengeful act justified by past suffering is the destruction of the Babri Masjid in the North-Indian city of Ayodhya on December 6, 1992. In a campaign launched by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Council of Hindus), a fundamentalist organization close to the BJP, it was claimed that the mosque was built on the remains of a temple in honor of god Rama, which had been destroyed by Muslim invaders. To redress the historical injustice, VHP activists demanded the Muslims should return the site to the Hindus. During the riots that followed the attack on the mosque and its destruction, approximately 2,000 people were killed.[34] For radical BJP members, Indian Muslims represent the ultimate outsider of society, just as Pakistan represents the external enemy. The internal irreconcilability corresponds to the relationship of violence outside, which seems to make the possession of the atomic bomb necessary.

Sure, all people should be given the right to make their own mistakes, from which they can draw the necessary lessons. But today, in the age of weapons of mass destruction - this is the conclusion drawn by Arundhati Roy from the experience of Hiroshima - it is increasingly risky to make mistakes. It is important for the survival of the entire world that mistakes are not repeated. Next time may be the last.[35] Gandhi's question about the soul of the destructive nation is now being asked by Indian critics of their own country: "The battle between those who demand nuclear weapons and those who oppose them is, therefore, a battle for the soul of India."[36]

On the brink of the precipice, mistakes must be excluded. Against this background, the Indian anti-colonial nonviolent resistance acquires its particular historical significance and exemplary character, as it is also a way of keeping open spaces for action. The “experiments with truth,” to which the title of Gandhi’s autobiography refers, were – as experiments – exposed to mistakes and errors, but allowed for corrections. This makes them an important and constructive complement to the Hiroshima experience, also in terms of the politics of memory. With the hardening of confrontations in memory of the Hiroshima bomb, the recollection of the nonviolent struggle helps to maintain or regain the capacity to act.

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historian Romesh Chandra Majumdar, foreign domination had begun not with Robert Clive’s victory at Plassey in the eighteenth century, but with the invasion of Muslims and the creation of the Delhi Sultanate: "The major part of India lost independence about five centuries before, and merely changed masters in the eighteenth century". Romesh Chandra Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, vol. I, Calcutta 1971, pp. XIX, XIII.

34 For details of this campaign see Sarvepalli Gopal (ed.), *Anatomy of a Confrontation. The Babri Masjid – Ram Janmabhumi Issue*, Penguin, New Delhi 1991. Ten years later, when, in the state of Gujarat, a train carrying pilgrims, returning from Ayodhya, caught fire at Godhra station, the regional government of Gujarat immediately accused Muslim groups of a plot, thus sparking pogroms against the state’s Muslim minority and resulting in the deaths of over 2,000 people. See the Amnesty International report: *India Justice, the victim - Gujarat state fails to protect women from violence*, January 2005, AI Index: ASA 20/001/2005. https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa20/002/2005/en/

35 This is why the conclusions of Indians about their past are not just Indians’. Just as the American memory of the dropping of the atomic bomb is not just Americans’. “The culture of memory of the United States in this respect is of concern to all of us.” Bürger, ibid.

36 M.V. Ramana and C. Rammanohar Reddy, *Battle for the soul of India* (= taken from the introduction to Prisoners of the Nuclear Dream), in: *The Hindu*, February 23, 2003.