Introduction

Making a Mahatma

Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* defines nation as “an imagined political community—imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (6). This path-breaking political thesis traces the range of conditions that stimulated nationalist consciousness in Europe and in the latter half of the 18\(^{th}\) century and the advent of independence struggles in the third world colonies in the first half of the 20\(^{th}\) century. Though Anderson’s analysis is Euro-centric, it holds good from an Indian perspective; the idea of ‘imagining’ especially relevant in the Indian context where there is no common language, religion, ethnicity or shared history. Sir John Strachey in 1888 averred that India was only a name of convenience, “a name which we give to a great region including a multitude of different countries” (3). Strachey was of the opinion that the ‘countries’ which constituted India differed among themselves more than the European countries, and that they could not boast of a distinct social or political identity. For him the most crucial thing about India was that “there is not, and never was an India, or even any country of India possessing, according to any European ideas, any sort of unity, physical, political, social or religious” (4). Europeans like Strachey, who spent years in India, could not conceive the awakening of
national sympathies in India: “that they should ever extend to India generally, that men of the Punjab, Bengal, the North-western provinces, and Madras, should ever feel that they belong to one Indian nation, is impossible. You might with as much reason and probability look forward to a time when a single nation will have taken the place of the various nations of Europe” (5). There were many, like Rudyard Kipling, who believed that India could never become an independent nation. To them, unlike the European countries, India had no national spirit and no common dynamics to unite the people and guide them forward.

Benedict Anderson conceives nationalism as a socially formulated cultural artefact and analyses the various factors responsible for the formation of the modern nation. He considers print capitalism as one of the conditions which made the ‘imagining’ easier by enabling the people “to think about themselves and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways” (36). The newspaper played a decisive role in creating a sense of identity and a feeling of community by connecting simultaneous events within a geopolitical territory.

By giving a new stability to language, print-capitalism was constructive in creating an “image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation” (44). The interaction between technology, capitalism and “fatality” or inevitability of “human linguistic diversity” resulted in difference
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in status between languages within a territory, creating “languages-of-power” (43) which dominated and influenced the final forms of print languages. It was this inter-connectedness between capitalism, technology and fatality which had facilitated the birth of modern nation. Anderson states: “We can summarize the conclusions to be drawn from the argument thus far by saying that the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fat diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation” (46). Anderson especially invokes the role played by the printed novel and the newspaper in making the nation become aware of itself, enabling the citizens of a nation to form an imagined community in the midst of their diversity. The novel conveys the sense of “the solidity of a single community, embracing characters, authors and readers moving onward through calendrical time” (27).

In India with its differences in language, culture, ethnicity and religion and with no common feature to bind the people together except the opposition to British rule, the role played by the nationalist novels and the articles which appeared in newspapers and various journals in arousing national spirit is stellar. Gandhi’s speeches and writings, especially those which appeared in Harijan and Young India and the symbols that he provided to the people, with Gandhi himself becoming the most eloquent, served as an inspiration for the people belonging to diverse castes and communities to consider themselves as
belonging to a single group. Acknowledged as the father of Indian nationalism, Gandhi’s words kindled the imagination of people so much so that a plethora of books were written about him, including works of fiction featuring his ideas and activities. Simone Panter-Brick comments: “The consciousness of nationalism in India and the consciousness of nationalism in Gandhi are intertwined” (15).

As the written texts stirred nationalist aspirations the notion of the Mahatma was also being constructed through them, especially in novels, stories and newspaper articles. The image of the Mahatma as encoded in the texts has undergone a shift in character down years, triggered by economic, political and social factors. Some of the nationalist novels written around 1930s are even referred to as the Mahatma novels as they extolled the virtues of Gandhian ideology. These printed texts constructed, simultaneously, the concepts of the Mahatma and the nation. Thus the evolution of the nation coincided with the formulation of the concept of the Mahatma.

Walter Benjamin’s concept of ‘aura’ will help us to understand the unique nature of Gandhi’s leadership, explain the profound influence he wielded over the nationalist movement, and gauge the attitudinal shift regarding Gandhi in the post-Independence era. Benjamin’s initial use of the term aura “Little History of Photography.” is in the sense of a “comprehensive illumination,” or a “breathy halo” (517), which encircle an individual or an
object of perception, emphasizing their individuality and genuineness. Benjamin claims that the photographer working before 1880 had his customer “equipped with an aura that had seeped into the very folds of the man’s frock coat or floppy cravat” (517). In his work “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” Benjamin considers aura as an intrinsic element in human relationship. Benjamin explains: “Experience of the aura thus rests on the transposition of a response common in human relationship . . . (188). A metonymic relationship exists between an object and the person who uses it. Referring to Schelling’s photograph Benjamin says that his coat “will surely pass into immortality along with him: the shape it has borrowed from its wearer is not unworthy of the creases in his face” (514). This aura of Schelling’s coat is the result of the long term material relationship with the wearer’s physical appearance and the whole picture has an “air of permanence” (514) about it. Despite Marxist leanings, Benjamin’s aesthetic conception goes beyond the materialistic, as he gives allowance to the metaphysical dimension of a work of art too. Since the existence of art depends upon human perception, the metaphysical and aesthetic quality arising out of its purview has become vital to Benjamin’s concept of aura. His initial development of the concept emphasized a natural intrinsic aura and aura as a function of perception. Benjamin says:
What is aura actually? A strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be. While at rest on a summer’s noon, to trace a range of mountains on the horizon, or a branch that throws its shadow on the observer, until the moment or the hour become part of their appearance—this is what it means to breathe the aura of those mountains, that branch. (“Little History” 518-19)

Outlined in the context of a specific time and space the mountains and branch put on the aura and are altered to a unique experience. The significance of these objects is linked to a particular moment and space. But in the case of photography, the experience of the object is no longer locked in a singular time and place, bringing the object closer to us, thus depriving it of its uniqueness. What is relevant here is a change in perception. Benjamin asserts: “The peeling away of the object’s shell, the destruction of the aura, is the signature of a perception whose sense for the sameness of things has grown to the point where even the singular, the unique, is divested of its uniqueness by means of its reproduction” (519). The reference in the text to the natural scene emphasizes the dual aspect of aura; it is inherent in the observed object or the individual and at the same time is linked to the perception of the beholder; it is metaphysical and physical at the same time. Visual perception and its temporality activate a complex spatial sense which is not confined to the
object’s immanence and its contingent apprehension. While the object remains spatially near, its aesthetic essence is distant. Thus the ‘auratic’ perception makes the subject aware of the “closeness” and also the “natural distance” (223) simultaneously, as Benjamin avers in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” The object or the individual too is subjected to this transformation in that they are invested with the power of the return gaze. Benjamin explains in “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire”: “To perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look back at us in return” (188). Thus Benjamin defines auratic experience as the effect on us when we feel an object of perception, a person or a work of art, returning our gaze. The concept of aura is more concerned with the subject, rather than with the object, and with an affective perception of the world.

In his “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Benjamin writes in detail about aura and its decline in the era of mechanical reproduction where, instead of intense and focused engagement on the viewer’s part there is an element of dissipative distraction. The popularity of reproduction is the result of “the desire of the contemporary masses to bring things ‘closer’ spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent towards overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction” (223). Benjamin recounts the changes engendered by printing or mechanical reproduction in the field of art:
Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence. This includes the changes which it may have suffered in physical condition over the years as well as the various changes in its ownership.

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A work of art bears testimony to the history which it has witnessed or experienced, but its technical reproduction jeopardizes this testimony which ultimately affects the authority of the object. Benjamin observes:

One might subsume the eliminated element in the term ‘aura’ and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. This is a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art. One might generalize by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. (“The Work of Art” 221)
Benjamin’s aura is the impact of a work of art when it has a unique presence or existence in time and space; and as such is related to authenticity. A reproduced work of art can never be completely present and its authenticity is lost as it cannot be reproduced. Reproductions testify to depreciation in value as the original is lost to the copy which is no longer unique and the object of the gaze loses its authenticity and authority.

Benjamin avers that human sensory perspective is not completely natural but historical as well, “the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity’s entire mode of existence” (222). These changes of perception are determined by and are a testimony to social transformations. The changes in contemporary perception can be understood as the “decay of the aura” ("The Work of Art” 222). Benjamin defines aura as the authenticity and uniqueness of works of art or a person related to their rootedness in a tradition. Benjamin contends: “The uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition” (223). But the reproduced work of art is detached from tradition. Aura is a quality which requires a specific, historically circumscribed mode of perception. Losing a sense of continuity with other works the reproduced work cannot establish its uniqueness by distinguishing itself from these works.

Thus technological reproduction becomes a “technique of diminution” ("Little History” 523), in which the work and its latent power, political and
magical, get harnessed by the masses. This weakening is both literal and metaphorical. In the case of a reproduction, the mobility of the work increases when it meets the viewer in his own spatial temporal coordinate, but this mobility is achieved at the expense of its uniqueness. Substituting the a-temporal uniqueness of an object or individual with the plenitude of the contingent mass reproduction shatters the auratic weave of time and space. In the age of mechanical reproduction mass assembly has become the norm and even the authentic work of art emanates a sense of similitude. The response to art has become increasingly depersonalised as individual appreciation is supplanted by the collective hysteria of the audience as in the case of films or a music event.

Mahatma Gandhi, the prime inspiration behind the Indian Independence struggle, was endowed with an inimitable auratic quality generated by his unique presence in time and space. Millions of common men and the peasants across India who looked up to him as their ‘Bapu’—father—and marched behind him as one body, could very well experience the magic. During the early phase of his political activity in India, the villagers who had only heard about him, bestowed upon him the mantle of a god and this magical aura was not impaired even during the worst communal strives; one word from the Mahatma was enough to make violent mobs put down the weapons in shame. After his tragic death, Gandhi has been brought closer
“spatially and humanly” (“The Work of Art” 223) to Indians through representations and images in films, advertisements, novels, articles, currency notes and as statues and place names, which has negatively affected his aura resulting in an attenuation in his stature in Indian society. Benjamin avers: “Unmistakably, reproduction as offered by picture magazines and newsreels differs from the image seen by the unarmed eye” (223). In this era of mass consumption and globalised materialism Gandhi’s charisma is on the wane, having already lost his political uniqueness after being disconnected from the specific and unique context of the anti-colonial resistance. The perceiver, no longer conversant with that political tradition, is unaffected since the aura is lost upon him too. This could very well be the reason for the sweeping changes in contemporary India’s perception of the Mahatma aired in popular culture, be it in the novels of Raja Rao or Sashi Tharoor or in the advertisements in mass media, or more explicitly, in the not very sympathetic political and social polemics on him.

Gandhi has proved to be the most enduring and universal figure amongst the modern politicians and statesmen, his admirers and detractors unanimously agree to this. To proceed further it is necessary that the ideas of Gandhi which have contributed to his unique status in the social and political sphere be examined in detail.
Mahatma Gandhi’s political journey began in South Africa and the beliefs and impressions Gandhi had formed in his early life concretized into definite ideas, especially the concepts of truth and nonviolence. Gandhi’s famous work *Hind Swaraj* incorporates ideas that were churned out of these South African experiences, and these ideas form the basis of his political thought.

Chapter twenty two of the brilliant study on Gandhi’s early life and career and which traces Gandhi’s evolution as a ‘Mahatma,’ *Gandhi Before India*, by Ramachandra Guha, begins with a comment made by a South African friend to the writer: “You gave us a lawyer; we gave you back a Mahatma” (530). Guha goes on to elaborate on how these early years, especially his stay in South Africa, moulded him as a politician, social reformer and a religious thinker. Gandhi himself had said later in his life that sections from Koran used to be read out at the temple in his native town. More significant than this was the influence of Jainism which was very strong in Gujarat. As a young boy he had Muslim friends and in England he had become acquainted with Christianity. But it was in South Africa that Gandhi developed a spirit of ecumenism which was not just religious but social and linguistic as well. Gandhi came to have Muslim, Christian, Jewish and Parsee friends and he had special relationships with labourers and hawkers. Through
the Tamil labourers in South Africa Gandhi became aware of the multiplicity of languages.

His tolerance of the ruling class, at times amounting to respect, had its first seeds sown in England, but grew into heartfelt friendship in some cases and broadmindedness in others, when he was in South Africa. Guha asserts that his ability to rise above religion, class and ethnicity was something unique and unparalleled among Gandhi’s contemporaries. He writes: “The settlements at Phoenix and Tolstoy were a meeting place, a melting pot, where, as the settlers lived and laboured together, social and religious distinctions were made insubstantial and even irrelevant” (533). While Indian National Congress sought to represent all sections of the society it failed to achieve this ideal in the first thirty years of its existence when it remained basically urban-centred middle class and educated elite. But Gandhi’s democratic insight far exceeded than that of his compatriots, and even his mentors within the Congress party, by the time he was in his mid thirties. “Had he not lived in South Africa, he might never have outgrown the conventional, confined, views of Indian men of his class and his generation” (533), Guha points out.

Gandhi’s ability to reach out to the people belonging to different religious and linguistic communities and also the underprivileged came to be appreciated by the Indians in South Africa and also by those in the mainland. “That in an age before television and the internet, a man who lived across the
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oceans and who had not been in the motherland for a full decade was so widely and appreciatively spoken of, was a striking revelation indeed” (535-36). In India people from different castes and communities, and belonging to geographical areas Gandhi did not even know existed, came to show interest in Gandhi’s early satyagrahas and held meetings in support of him. That he could even transcend the question of gender, in those very orthodox times, was evident in the way he allowed women to become satyagrahis and court arrest.

But, according to Guha, there was one defect in Gandhi’s otherwise exemplary conduct of inclusiveness. His relationship with Africans was kept to the minimum and initially he even had a, not very popular, notion of the Africans as slightly inferior to Indians while the Europeans held a superior position in his hierarchy of civilizations. In their controversial work *The South African Gandhi: The Stretcher Bearer of the Empire* Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed emphasize that Gandhi insisted on the superiority of Indians over Africans. They argue: “Gandhi cut himself off from Africans and would not countenance any alliance with their struggles” (89). They maintain that Gandhi exhibited class prejudices even towards indentured Indians. Desai and Vahed aver: “The future Mahatma had a narrow racial lens when it came to oppression and exploitation” (197). But slowly he moved out of that bigotry and began to expect and long for a unification of the races.
Gandhi had always been interested in other religions and cultures and his experiences away from India, especially his life in Johannesburg, only sharpened that interest and helped in the creation of the ‘Mahatma.’ Guha opines:

Had Gandhi always lived or worked in India, he would never have met dissident Jews or Nonconformist Christians. Life in the diaspora also exposed him more keenly to the heterogeneity of his own homeland. Had he followed the family tradition and worked in a princely state in Kathiawar he would never have met Tamils or North Indians. Had he practised law in Bombay he could not have counted plantation workers or roadside hawkers among his clients.

For most people, South Africa in the early 1900’s was a crucible of social inequality, where individuals of one race or class learned very quickly to separate themselves from people of other races and classes. For this Indian, however, South Africa became a crucible of human togetherness, allowing him to forge bonds of affiliation with compatriots with whom, had he remained at home, he would have absolutely no contact whatsoever. (537)
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Gandhi developed his writing and editorial skills and learned to speak convincingly while working in South Africa. It was to promote the interests of Indians in Natal and Transvaal that he started the periodical, *Indian Opinion*, in which he wrote essays in both Hindi and Gujarati. The civil disobedience movement he fashioned in South Africa became the strongest weapon in Indian struggle for independence too. Had he not met stiff opposition in the form of Milner and Smuts in his fight against discriminatory laws in South Africa, he would not have been able to develop the weapon of satyagraha or gained the confidence to use it in a large country like India. It was Gandhi’s political activism and his leadership in South Africa that helped in developing a sense of nationality among Indians in South Africa and eventually this nationalist pride got transmitted to India too, when the people in the mainland came to know about the resistance offered by Indians in South Africa to the white rulers.

Gandhi had initially been an ideal British citizen and student extolling the virtues of the British institutions and its values. He privileged duty over rights which prompted him to participate in the Boer War and later the Zulu Rebellion on the side of the British Empire as its loyal citizen. Gandhi was keenly aware of his duties: “I felt that if I demanded rights as a British citizen, it was also my duty as such, to participate in the defense of the British Empire. I held then that India could achieve her complete emancipation only within
and through the British Empire” (*My Experiments with Truth* 179). Even though his decision to join the war seemed inconsistent with his belief in ahimsa he hoped to solve this contradiction by choosing ambulance work.

Gandhi’s attitude to imperial power was slowly shifting and it was given further impetus by a new legislation in the form of the Draft Asiatic Law Amendment Ordinance. With the compulsion to register imposed upon all the Indians, Gandhi felt the full impact of humiliation and discrimination implied in the ordinance. He could no longer remain indiscriminately loyal, and realized the futility of working within the Empire. The seeds of swaraj and satyagraha were sown here and under Gandhi’s leadership Indians in South Africa started the unique protest of civil disobedience.

Indians living and working in South Africa, isolated from the mainland and at the receiving end of racial prejudice, felt a sense of alienation. But Gandhi’s leadership and his writings in journals like *Indian Opinion*, combined with the anger against the discrimination they had to face in an alien land, created a sense of solidarity among them which led to the awakening of nationalist consciousness. When the government authorities insisted on their difference and forced them to register, it kindled in them a sense of their nation, which, though far away, determined their fate and identity. As with other Indians in South Africa the prejudice and divisiveness exhibited by the authorities made Gandhi too aware of the bondage of Indians not only in
South Africa, but back in his homeland too. His experiences in South Africa solidified his political ideas and strengthened his perceptions regarding a unified and independent India. By the time of Gandhi’s return to India in 1914, he had complete faith in satyagraha as the most effective and ethical weapon in the fight for swaraj.

When Gandhi was invited to participate in the war conference in April 1918, despite the doubts that had begun to assail him regarding his allegiance to the British Empire, he decided to honour the invitation. To assuage his scruples and to gratify his nationalistic pride he spoke in Hindi in the conference. Believing that India could be saved only through her relationship with the British, Gandhi decided to recruit soldiers for the war, firm in his belief that recruiting drive would guarantee independence for India. Gandhi had India’s right to self rule in his mind when he embarked upon the recruiting mission; evidently he had begun to privilege rights over duties and his allegiance to the Empire was on the down slide.

In 1920s, Gandhi’s attitude to the British Empire had a complete volte-face with the ‘Punjab wrong’ added to the ‘Khilafat wrong’ in the list of grievances against the government. A demand for swaraj was also incorporated in to the charter of demands claiming that his non-cooperation movement with enough support would fetch swaraj within one year.
In 1920 Gandhi became the unchallenged leader of the Congress party in complete charge of the nationalist movement involving both Hindus and Muslims. Gandhi had only promised swaraj but it was enough to raise high expectations and provoke rigorous activities among the Indians, proving to be path breaking slogan in India’s road to independence. The focus was on nonviolent, though anti-constitutional, resistance gently side-stepping the constitutional means. Gandhi’s emphasis was on the means rather than the end which was rather unspecified; it was still unclear whether swaraj be established within the Empire or outside it. Only nonviolent means would result in the desired end; Gandhi used even the Khilafat movement to that particular end, but in the process, inadvertently, sowed the seeds of Partition.

Gandhi suspended non-cooperation movement in 1922 in the wake of Chauri-Chaura incident. He was arrested and sent to jail for six years. Thus began a new phase in Gandhi’s nationalism. He had lost much of his influence in the Congress and wanted to regain that through compromise; his intention was to strive for swaraj after regaining the control of the Congress party. According to Simone Panter-Brick, Gandhi relied on a “three pronged strategy” (100), to attain political success. After winning over the major political party he aimed at securing its unity. Gandhi desired to realize Hindu – Muslim unity and finally wanted to extend his political influence to the countryside through the policy of self-reliance which was symbolised in the
spinning wheel. This would transform the Congress, according to Panter-Brick, “from an elitist body to a populist organisation” (100).

But the way to these three objectives was ridden with obstacles. He had to yield, to a certain extent, to the divergent views of Motilal Nehru and C.R. Das, who had been elected to the new Legislative Council. The abolition of the Caliphate destroyed the Hindu-Muslim unity which he had desired so much. The Congress party was reluctant to entertain Gandhi’s enthusiasm for the spinning wheel. Soon Gandhi was forced to privilege the integration of the party over his other interests as the party was his means to reach out to every Indian, which had always been his dream.

Gandhi conceived swaraj as different from mere political independence, giving emphasis to self rule or disciplined rule from within. Through his able national leadership he could transform the theory of swaraj into a political reality. Gandhi developed his concept of swaraj in three distinct ways. He forged a connection between swaraj and his conception of satyagraha or the power of nonviolence. Even though nonviolence had not been a novel concept Gandhi was the first political thinker to theorize the idea for political purpose and to have tried out ways to make it practical. He emphasized the relevance of self rule or self realization for gaining national freedom, thus connecting the personal to the political. Thirdly, Gandhi considered social evils like caste and untouchability, economic inequality and
communal conflict as obstacles to swaraj and insisted upon social reforms as equally relevant as political independence.

Satyagraha, which literally means “holding firmly to the truth,” according to Gandhi, is “truth force” (Collected Works 16: 368-69), which transforms a situation of conflict, but is not content with nullifying that conflict. Distinguishing satyagraha from passive resistance, Gandhi links passive resistance with “duragraha” (Collected Works 14: 63-65), arguing that it is the weapon of the weak which produces prejudice and exclusiveness. Gandhi envisages satyagraha as the political weapon of the strong which rises above all sorts of violence; a weapon which positively substitutes violence and at the same time is superior it. A satyagrahi has no hatred for his adversary, has only sympathy for him, and tries out alternatives which will prove satisfactory to all the parties. This sympathy and moral support strengthen interpersonal relationships and the opponent is persuaded to modify his stand. The theory of satyagraha is based on the concept that human being has an innate capacity to change. Gandhi formulates the following rules for a satyagrahi as an individual:

- A satyagrahi, i.e., a civil resister, will harbour no anger.
- He will suffer the anger of the opponent.
• In so doing he will put up with assaults from the opponent, never retaliate: but he will not submit, out of fear of punishment or the like, to any order given in anger.

• When any person in authority seeks to arrest a civil resister, he will voluntarily submit to the arrest, and he will not resist the attachment or removal of his own property, if any, when it is sought to be confiscated by authorities.

• If a civil resister has any property in his possession as a trustee, he will refuse to surrender it, even though in defending it he might lose his life. He will however never retaliate.

• Non-retaliation excludes swearing and cursing.

• Therefore a civil resister will never insult his opponent, and therefore also not take part in many of the newly coined cries which are contrary to the spirit of ahimsa

• A civil resister will not salute the Union Jack, nor will he insult it or officials, English or Indian.

• In the course of the struggle if anyone insults an official or commits an assault upon him, a civil resister will protect such official or officials from the insult or attack even at the risk of his life. (Gandhi Reader 158)
Fasting unto death is the strongest weapon to be used by a real satyagrahi. It is very effective when used with a pure heart and after realizing its implications. Gandhi frequently refers to fasting as a weapon to convey the sense of engaging in a ‘nonviolent’ war.

Asserting the relationship between swaraj and satyagraha Gandhi in *Hind Swaraj* defines swaraj as self-rule and satyagraha as the means through which, after willingly sacrificing oneself, individuals attain the power to govern themselves. He conceives it as “the reverse of resistance by arms” (88). Gandhi elaborates:

When I refuse to do a thing that is repugnant to my conscience, I use soul force. For instance, the Government of the day has passed a law which is applicable to me. I do not like it. If by using violence I force the Government to repeal the law, I am employing what may be termed body-force. If I do not obey the law and accept the penalty for its breach, I use soul-force. It involves sacrifice of self. (88)

By sacrificing oneself one’s soul-force is fully developed which in turn makes one capable of achieving swaraj. Gandhi’s aim is to gain swaraj through satyagraha.
Gandhi’s concept of swaraj has four significant constituents: truth, nonviolence, political and economic freedom. Swaraj does not consider political and economic independence as its only objective; it has two other goals, moral and social independence and dharma. Dharma can be translated as truth, the “living Truth” (Collected Works 64: 191-192), embracing all religions, and at the same time transcending them. It is unchanging and imperishable and permeates everything. Gandhi claims that it has been his devotion to truth that has encouraged him to work in the political field. Social and moral advancement and nonviolence are interdependent terms for Gandhi and to him, without truth and nonviolence no one can gain political and economic freedom. Gandhi considers truth as being one with God and one can realize this truth only through ahimsa. One has to search for truth, which lies in every human heart, oneself and has to live according to one’s perception of it. Gandhi’s greatness and the uniqueness of his perspective are evident when he forbids individuals from forcing others to accept their own concept of truth.

Gandhi considers the method of nonviolence as infallible and he exhorts people to use it in all circumstances. He asserts: “My method is conversion, not coercion; it is self-suffering, not the suffering of the tyrant” (Gandhi Reader 74). Gandhi considers ahimsa or nonviolence as the weapon of the strong and not that of the weak. A timid person, who refrains from violence because he is afraid, is not practicing nonviolence. Gandhi identifies
a practitioner of nonviolence: “He alone has power to practise the dharma of
ahimsa who although fully capable of inflicting violence does not inflict it. He
alone practises the ahimsa dharma who voluntarily and with love refrains
from inflicting violence on anyone” (Gandhi Reader 107).

The courage that Gandhi insists upon is not physical but mental; love,
compassion and forgiveness, which are the attributes of the brave, are integral
part of nonviolence too. Only a person who has developed inner strength can
practice ahimsa because it is a very difficult vow to keep, a practice which
needs extreme penance and renunciation. Gandhi points out: “There is dharma
in self-control and, adharma in indulgence” (Gandhi Reader 108).

Gandhi tried to spiritualize politics and rejected any separation
between his convictions and public behaviour. Shashi Tharoor in “The Legacy
of Mahatma Gandhi” points out: “In his life, religion flowed into politics; his
public persona meshed seamlessly with his private conduct” (106). It was his
unique method of civil disobedience coupled with his flair for planning and
coordination that gave India her political freedom and the world a saint and a
politician. Tharoor in “A Myth and an Idea” summarises Gandhi’s political
method and how the British government found it impossible to withstand him
and deny India freedom for long:

Where sporadic terrorism and moderate constitutionalism had
both proved ineffective, Gandhi took the issue of freedom to
the masses as one of simple right and wrong and gave them a technique to which the British had no response. By abstaining from violence Gandhi wrested the moral advantage. By breaking the law non-violently he showed up the injustice of the law. By accepting the punishments imposed on him he confronted his captors with their own brutalization. By voluntarily imposing suffering upon himself in his hunger strikes he demonstrated the lengths to which he was prepared to go in defence of what he considered to be right. (18)

Gandhi’s evolution from a timid and tongue tied barrister into a captivating and influential leader of Indians had occurred in South Africa. Gandhi had evolved into a captivating and influential leader of Indians in South Africa. *The Star* of Johannesburg wrote about the nature of his influence when Gandhi won the support of Indians in the resistance against the anti-Indian Act 2 of 1907 passed by the Transvaal Government:

Mr. Gandhi appeared on the scene. He took up a hostile attitude to this law, and his personality was so marked that from the start he secured practically the undivided support of the entire Indian community of the Transvaal, and material assurances of his countrymen in India and elsewhere…. Rather small in stature and frail in constitution, Gandhi has bound the Indians
together by his earnestness and his belief in the justice of his cause. There was no rigorous pledge or blind obedience demanded, and the appeal to conscience has been sufficient to enable him to carry his campaign from the Commons to the Lords to the very foot of the Throne. (qtd in Guha, Gandhi Before India 409-10)

Gandhi emphasized that equality and harmony are compulsory elements of a society in order for it to attain swaraj. It was necessary that the gap between the different sections of the society was bridged before India deserved self rule. Gandhi deplored untouchability, Hindu-Muslim conflict and the ruthless neglect of the illiterate masses in the cities and villages and showed rare empathy while approaching the problems of casteism and the misery of Indian peasantry. His dream of India was an egalitarian society which was rid of the evils of untouchability, religious strife and rural-urban divide. For him the equitable and harmonious social order of ‘sarvodaya’ was as essential as freedom. He says: “I am not interested in freeing India merely from the English yoke. I am bent upon freeing India from any yoke whatsoever. I have no desire to exchange ‘king log for king stork.’ Hence for me the movement of Swaraj is a movement of self-purification” (Collected Works 24: 227).
As a leader Gandhi understood the importance of the use of local language and traditional symbols to ensure the participation of people in the national movement, especially so when he wanted to reach out to the peasantry. The divide between the educated elite and the peasantry could be bridged to a certain extent by emphasizing the use of khadi and the spinning wheel. Gandhi saw spinning wheel as the medium to forge a viable and enduring bond between the masses and the national leaders, the elite and the poor. He states: “I can only think of spinning as the fittest and most acceptable sacrificial body labour. I cannot imagine anything nobler or more national than that, for we should all do the labour that the poor must do and thus identify ourselves with them and through them with all mankind” (Collected Works 21: 308).

Gandhi believed that spinning wheel would confirm the dignity of rural life. The various symbols that Gandhi brought together including the spinning wheel, khadi, cow and the Gandhi cap, appealed not just to the emotions of the people, but were rational too, derived from the life of ordinary Indians. Bhikhu Parekh, while emphasizing the relevance of these symbols suggests that Gandhi himself became a symbol:

Gandhi not only evolved countless symbols ... but also became one himself. Partly by conscious design and partly as spontaneous expressions of his whole way of life, his dress, language, mode of public speaking, food, bodily gestures, ways
of sitting, walking and talking, laughter, humour and staff became symbols of a specific way of life. Each evoked deep cultural memories, spoke volumes, and conveyed highly complex messages. (13)

In his support of swadeshi he assures that it secures both ‘dharma’ and ‘artha.’ Over dependence on mill cloth encourages the import of yarn, as the production of cloth in India does not meet the demand, and this in turn will increase the cost of the yarn. Through the swadeshi ‘dharma,’ by taking to spinning and weaving or encouraging those who spin and weave, Indians can protect their own ‘dharma’ and ‘artha’. The introduction of hand spinning and weaving as subsidiary occupation into the homes of poor peasants will encourage them to be self reliant and save them from poverty.

On another level the vow of ‘swadeshi’ is necessary as, in its highest sense, it represents “the final emancipation of human soul from its earthly bondage” (Gandhi Reader 76). A devotee of swadeshi will consider the service of his neighbours, and through this, the service of the whole universe, as his duties. That is why Gandhi considers khadi as the first step in fulfilling swadeshi ‘dharma,’ as a service easily understood and performed by the people and at the same time equipping people to survive. Gandhi emphasizes: “Swadeshism is not a cult of hatred. It is a doctrine of selfless service that has its roots in the purest ahimsa, i.e., love” (Gandhi Reader 78).
Gandhi does not consider political power as the final objective; it can only be one of the means employed for the complete development of the individual. Gandhi gives his conception of political power and ideal state:

The power to control national life through national representatives is called political power. Representatives will become unnecessary if the national life becomes so perfect as to be self-controlled. It will then be a state of enlightened anarchy in which each person will become his own ruler. He will conduct himself in such a way that his behaviour will not hamper the well-being of his neighbours. In an ideal State there will be no political institution and therefore no political power. That is why Thoreau has said in his classic statement that that government is the best which governs the least. (Gandhi Reader 79)

Even when rejecting the concepts of socialism as incongruous with the inherent nature of India he asserts the equal rights of both the workers and their employers. He insists on the importance of forging a kinship between them so that there will not be a class war between them. Gandhi believes that India is capable of evolving a separate form of communism different from its western equivalent but based on “the fundamental rights of all and equal justice to all” (Gandhi Reader 238). The western form of communism
subscribes to the concept that man is essentially selfish. But Gandhi is convinced that man’s immortal spirit can rise above selfishness and violence and that this differentiates him from ordinary brutes. In India especially, with its Hindu tradition and its philosophy derived from years of rigorous penance and renunciation, socialism or communism should be “based on non-violence and on the harmonious co-operation of labour and capital and the landlord and the tenant” (Gandhi Reader 239).

Gandhi assures the zamindars that as long as they are willing to safeguard the rights of their tenants and labourers the government has the duty to protect their private rights and property. It is the state’s prerogative to ensure the fair and proper use of private property and to prevent its misuse. The landlords should be aware that they hold the property for the benefit of their tenants and they will create no problem as long as they are free and happy. Gandhi believes in the essential goodness of man and in the possibility of forming an ideal relationship between different sections of the society, eliminating chances of class conflict. He declares: “Class war is foreign to the essential genius of India which is capable of evolving a form of communism broad-based on the fundamental rights of all and equal justice to all” (Gandhi Reader 238). When Gandhi exhorted the princes to give up their riches and keep them in trust for the people, he was actually putting his faith in the masters’ sense of moral responsibility with regard to the peasants and was not
exhorting the peasantry to rise against the masters. He had deep respect for the
sacrifices made by great people like Lenin but had no faith in Marxism as a
political ideology as it left little space for individual conscience. His
misgivings about the concept of state socialism are expressed in his letter to
Nirmal Kumar Bose:

The state represents violence in a concentrated and organized
form. The individual has a soul, but as the state is a soulless
machine, it can never be weaned from violence to which it
owes its very existence.

I look upon an increase of the power of the State with the
greatest fear, because although while apparently doing good by
minimizing exploitation, it does the greatest harm to mankind
by destroying individuality, which lies at the root of all
progress. (*Collected Works* 65: 316-319)

Gandhi’s philosophy, adhering to his belief in the equal rights and the
basic dignity of every one, had a unique approach to industrial production. He
did not want to take the machine away from the hands of those who controlled
it and give it to the operators or the labourers “Instead,” as Mira Kamdar says,
“Gandhi’s much more radical goal was to stop the machine from working at
all, beginning by removing India from its relentless advance”(61). Gandhi
disapproved of industrialization which made man lose his dignity and
freedom; *Hind Swaraj* is an unequivocal disapproval of modernity and industrialization.

While many Gandhian scholars read *Hind Swaraj* as a harsh criticism of modern civilization, Partha Chatterjee would choose to consider it “as a text in which Gandhi’s relation to nationalism can be shown to rest on a fundamental critique of the idea of civil society” (85). To him Gandhi attempts in *Hind Swaraj* to explain India’s subjection on terms of India’s moral failure rather than incriminating the British. Gandhi asserts in *Hind Swaraj*: “The English have not taken India: we have given it to them. They are not in India because of their strength, but because we keep them . . . . (38) He says further: “it is truer to say that we gave India to the English than that India was lost” (39). It was not the inadequacy of Indian culture that led to her subjection but rather it was captivated by the splendour of modern civilization. Indian society by and large has come to appreciate and accept the supposed advantages of modernity and this has led to a continuation of India’s subjection. Even after the departure of the English she will have “English rule without the Englishman” (26), since India’s subjection is the consequence of her allegiance to the modern civilization. The cessation of British rule in India alone will not free her.

Chatterjee explains that *Hind Swaraj* is primarily a repudiation of western born modern civilization and its Indian version. The concepts of
modernity and progress are criticised and the claims of wealth, leisure, health and happiness made on their behalf are viewed with suspicion. Modern civilization makes man self indulgent and the society intensely competitive. It unleashes the evils of war, suffering, poverty, and disease into the society. Man, regarded as an inexhaustible consumer, is submerged in the tidal wave of industrialization, and inequality and oppression have become rampant in the society. Machinery, by increasing production, only increases the demand for more, thus bringing destruction to both the city and the countryside. For Gandhi the developments in science and technology have only lead to increasing production, endless consumption and ruthless competition and ultimately to colonization and modern imperialism to meet the demands of production and consumption. It is for economic purpose, for trade and commerce and to find market for their goods that western countries have colonized other countries. Gandhi wants industrialization to be rejected completely, since merely removing its defects will not solve the problems it creates. Large scale industrialization, producing inhuman and exploitative relations of exchange between town and country and between metropolis and colony, leads to poverty and unemployment in the villages. Gandhi confirms: “Industrialization on a mass scale will necessarily lead to passive or active exploitation of the villagers as the problem of competition and marketing
come in. Therefore we have to concentrate on the village being self-contained, manufacturing mainly for use” (Collected Works 63: 241).

To Partha Chatterjee, Gandhi’s renunciation of modern civilization is basically a criticism of civil society. Chatterjee analyses Gandhi’s comments as:

a fundamental critique of the entire edifice of bourgeois society: its continually expanding and prosperous economic life, based on individual property, the social division of labour and the impersonal laws of the market, described with clinical precision and complete moral approbation by Mandeville and Smith; its political institutions based on a dual notion of sovereignty in which the people in theory rule themselves, but are only allowed to do so through the medium of their representatives whose actions have to be ratified only once in so many years; its spirit of innovation, adventure and scientific progress; its rationalization of philosophy and ethics and secularization of art and education. (90)

Gandhi has no faith in parliament, calling it “a sterile woman and a prostitute” (Hind Swaraj 29), since it cannot act independently because it succumbs to outside influences, despite its claim to sovereignty. Another defect he found in the parliament is its lack of constancy, swinging from one
parties to another. Instead of adhering to truth and honesty, the members of parliament secure their own interests and the interest of their party. In the present political structure, anyone with enough influence can manipulate the government machinery. Gandhi denounces the tall claims of legal equality and neutrality of state institutions maintaining that they only further the divisions and inequalities within the society.

Equality and harmony will prevail in the society only when communal morality can hold its sway over politics. He introduces the concept of popular sovereignty against the system of representative government where the society controls itself through the exercise of the collective moral will of the people. Gandhi was averse to political power which controls national life through chosen representatives. Gandhi’s ideal state is Ramrajya, which is a patriarchy in which a ruler with superior moral qualities and strict devotion to truth always articulates the collective will. This utopia adopts an ideal system of production, adapted to the traditional ‘varna’ scheme of specialization where the exchange of commodities and services fulfils the condition of absolute reciprocity. This reciprocity ensures that there is no mindless competition and also guarantees equal dignity to different kinds of labour.

Gandhi has reservations regarding modern education too, especially the undue importance given to the knowledge of letters which has given validity to social inequalities. The moral aspect of education has been
completely ignored along with the need for the assimilation of an individual into the collective moral values of the particular society. This has resulted in a feeling of discontentment, self-indulgence, hypocrisy and moral anarchy. Gandhi challenges the unreasonable distinction between physical and intellectual labour, which is another facet of modern civil society. He refutes the claims made on behalf of scientific temper and technological development, which hanker after physical comfort and luxury. The lack of ethical consideration in the field of medicine has only led to an increase in the consumption of medicines rather than a permanent cure for diseases, and the cause for diseases themselves can be located in the present system of social life.

Chatterjee contends that *Hind Swaraj* does not intend to criticise western culture or religion or to establish the superiority of Hindu religion. To Gandhi the western society, by accepting the benefits of modern civilization, has given up the teachings of Christianity. In fact, Gandhi’s thoughts are not confined within the thematic of nationalism. He often ignores the theoretical and logical conjectures of contemporary nationalists and disallows their rationalism and historicism. He dismisses the historical objections to his claims of fetching freedom for India through soul force as irrelevant. For Gandhi history is not a record of the truth, since truth is universal and unchanging it transcends history. He is not interested in the historical veracity
of scriptures, for him what is relevant is the message embedded in the texts and not their authenticity. He would argue that the great Indian epics deal with poetic truth and not historical truth and the only way to discover this truth is to approach the text from the perspective of one’s belief and knowledge. Gandhi does not expect the society to condone the unjust practices which are supposedly sanctioned by the scriptures since these practices are repulsive to moral sense.

Gandhi cannot agree to the absolute faith in rationalism and science since that will only lead to insanity and helplessness. He believes that scientific knowledge is applicable only to limited aspects of human life. Wherever reason fails, faith triumphs, provided that the faith is firmly rooted in moral principles. So, for Gandhi, truth is a moral constant and transcendental and cannot be expressed within the frame work of rational-theoretical discourse.

Partha Chatterjee realizes that Gandhi’s aforementioned arguments smack of romanticism to many intellectuals, especially his pleas for an ideal moral order, and that his critique of civil society suggests “an idealization of pre-capitalist economic and social relations” (98). But Chatterjee argues that, even though Gandhi’s solutions would appear practically ineffectual to the societal problems, he “took a big step forward by posing, comprehensively and in all its economic, political and moral aspects, the democratic demand of
the small producers, chiefly the peasants” (98). Gandhi’s views on science, modern medicine, and industrial production and his ideas on peaceful resistance, owe much to the works of Edward Carpenter, John Ruskin and Leo Tolstoy. It is evident that he has sympathy for the ideas of 19th century European romantics and the critics of modernity, rationalism and scientific progress. In spite of these influences, Partha Chatterjee argues that the central core of Gandhism does not lie in a “romantic problematic” (98). Clarifying the point, Chatterjee says that, while Carpenter’s ideas regarding adverse effect of the increase of man’s powers of production on his relationship with nature, himself and his fellow beings have appealed to Gandhi, his theoretical attempts, based on the ideas of Engels and Lewis Morgan have not impressed him. Similarly, when Gandhi accepts Ruskin’s criticism of political economy based on self-interest and greed he completely ignores Ruskin, the “modernist” and the “historicist” (99). Ruskin favours science and progress and is on the side of political reform and developments in the field of knowledge, art and letters, positioning intellect and reason higher than conscience and faith.

Chatterjee asserts that Gandhi is least concerned about these theoretical structures and explanations. Gandhi is unlike the European romantics, is disinterested in “the conflicting demands of Reason and Morality, Progress and Happiness, Historical Necessity and Human Will” (99). When Gandhi
idealizes a fair, happy, and peaceful society, Chatterjee notes that it is not a romantic longing for an old, long lost, harmonious society, since Gandhi has not conceived his problem “within the thematic bounds of post-enlightenment thought” (99). He is not tormented by the conflict between individuality and universalism and is not concerned with spiritual anguish or aestheticism, like the Indian modernists and literary romantics.

Gandhi’s critique of civil society arises from a perspective which lies outside the framework of post-enlightenment thought. Even though his ideas, to a certain extent, can be aligned with that of the traditional intelligentsia of India, Gandhi is not merely another “peasant intellectual” (100), according to Partha Chatterjee. For a thorough understanding of Gandhian ideology it would be better if it is studied “in relation to the historical development of elite-nationalist thought in India” (100). Gandhism is not a “direct expression of peasant ideology. It was an ideology conceived as an intervention in the elite-nationalist discourse of the time and was formed and shaped by the experiences of a specifically national movement” (100). Chatterjee suggests that only when we relate it to its particular historical context can we realize its unique achievement. Gandhism has opened up possibilities for achieving the most important historical task for a successful national revolution in a country like India; it has made possible, “the political appropriation of the subaltern classes . . .”(100). Gandhian ideology expedited the process of the assimilation
of peasantry, the largest popular section of the nation, into the evolving political structures of the new nation state.

Chatterjee suggests that Gandhi’s critique of civil society disregards “the thematic of post-enlightenment thought, and hence of nationalist thought as well” (100). He argues:

In its formulation of the problem of town-country economic exchanges, of the cultural domination of the new urban educated classes, and above all, of the legitimacy of resistance to an oppressive state apparatus, it was able to encapsulate perfectly the specific political demands as well as the modalities of thought of a peasant-communal consciousness.

(100)

Chatterjee opines that even when Gandhism can be compared with Tolstoy’s critique of a bourgeois political order, unlike Tolstoy, Gandhi is concerned with the practical, organisational aspects of a political movement which is also a national one that is expected to operate within the institutional processes of the colonial government. There are practical problems associated with legal and political structures in a democracy and the organizational problems related to a democratic political movement. According to Chatterjee Gandhian thought has tried to accommodate two contradictory aspects which are also its constituent elements: “a nationalism which stood upon a critique of
the very idea of civil society, a movement supported by the bourgeoisie which rejected the idea of progress, the ideology of a political organisation fighting for the creation of a modern national state which accepted at the same time the ideal of an ‘enlightened anarchy’ ” (101).

According to Chatterjee there are many ambiguities like these in Gandhism and these ambiguities are responsible for the creation of the two movements that are crucial in the formation of the Indian state. They are the transformation of all types of people living in different parts of the state into bearers of “the message of the Mahatma” and “the appropriation of this movement into the structural forms of a bourgeois organizational, and later constitutional, order” (102). Chatterjee wants to deal with those aspects of Gandhism which have made possible the coexistence of these contradictions within a single ideological unity. The answer lies in the two concepts of ahimsa and satyagraha and the experimental platform which form their epistemic base.

For Gandhi, to seek and to discover ‘Absolute Truth’ is the purpose of our lives and till one reaches this transcendental truth one has to be sincerely committed to the relative truth as one knows it. This unwavering practice of the relative truth will enable us to reach the Absolute Truth. Meanwhile one has to be ready to put one’s belief to test, learn from experience and revise
those beliefs if necessary. Gandhi asserts in his introduction to his autobiography:

But for me, truth is the sovereign principle, which includes numerous other principles. This truth is not only truthfulness in word, but truthfulness in thought also, and not only the relative truth of our conception, but the Absolute Truth, the Eternal Principle, that is, God. There are innumerable definitions of God, because His manifestations are innumerable. . . . But I worship God as Truth only. (My Experiments with Truth xi)

For Chatterjee, Gandhi’s criticism of modern civilization and his advocacy of traditional village life, stem from his belief that the enduring nature of Indian civilization and its “timeless ahistoricity” (101) prove its truth. India cannot be persuaded to change because change is not necessary for her. The Indian society is founded on principles which have been proved true through experience. To protect this social organisation from the evil consequences of colonial rule, including poverty, Gandhi exhorts us to reject the institutions of the civil society and also its economic, cultural and political structures. Gandhi’s view has been that any process that helps India to eliminate the poverty of her masses will also give her independence. “It was only in the context of the evolution of the political movement that the Gandhian ideology became something more than a utopian doctrine”
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(Chatterjee 103). All the contradictory aspects of Gandhian ideology have been brought together by the flexibility of the conception of truth.

In 1917 Gandhi explained the concept of satyagraha as not mere passive resistance but as intense political activity by large masses of people. For him satyagraha was a form of mass resistance, which was legitimate and truthful, wielded against state oppression. At this stage Gandhi had not conceived it as part of the political struggle against the colonial government in order to replace it, but only to get rid of its injustices, and thus “intended to articulate only a ‘negative consciousness’ ” (Chatterjee 104). Satyagraha represented the essential nature of peasant-communal struggle against an unjust authority. This peasant resistance was not always expressed in non-violent forms, but Gandhi was quite undeterred. He believed that it was not a difficult task to educate the ignorant, unlettered Indian peasants in satyagraha as they already knew dharma. And, for a person to change from satyagraha to “a-satyagraha” (Collected Works 13: 524) was very difficult.

A satyagrahi leader needs to have virtues like courage and self-control more than a man who prefers violence; the state and even the whole world will benefit from such a man. Gandhi believed that people’s spontaneous resistance to injustice and oppression had the strength to produce desired results and this inspired him to exhort the people to participate in the agitation against the Rowlatt Bill in 1917. But this first experience of a nationwide political action
made him grasp his mistakes. “He now became aware of the fundamental incompatibility of political action informed solely by a negative consciousness with the procedural norms of a bourgeois legal order” (Chatterjee 105). Gandhi now realised that only a person who was used to obeying voluntarily the state laws had the right to use the weapon of civil disobedience. This led to the formation of a new principle for civil disobedience. Gandhi confirms:

I realized that before a people could be fit for offering civil disobedience, they should thoroughly understand its deeper implication. That being so, before restarting civil disobedience on a mass scale, it would be necessary to create a band of well-tired, pure-hearted volunteers who thoroughly understood the strict conditions of Satyagraha. They could explain these to the people, and by sleepless vigilance keep them on the right path. 

(Autobiography 392)

Thus the political concept of satyagrahi as leader was formed. Considering the relation between leaders and followers Gandhi says that the people should “choose their leaders most decidedly” (Collected Works 16: 441), and that the leaders have to guide the masses in the proper direction since the mass resistance against unjust laws is the sole guarantee against state oppression. When the agitation against the Rowlatt Bill turned violent Gandhi learned another valuable lesson. In political action the masses don the physical form of
a mob with no mind of its own and no forethought. The mob can be easily led, either by wily manipulators or by committed and enlightened leaders. When undertaking mass political action, the priority is to create a group of sincere, selfless, open minded political workers who can truly lead and guide the masses. Gandhi confirms: “But a few intelligent, sincere, local workers are needed, and the whole nation can be organized to act intelligently, and democracy can be evolved out of mobocracy” (Collected Works 18: 275).

According to Partha Chatterjee this problematic soon became central to the concept of ahimsa. The concept of ahimsa, when applied in the field of politics, became “intense political activity” performed by “large masses of people” (107). Chatterjee says:

But it was not so much about resistance as about the modalities of resistance, about organizational principles, rules of conduct, strategies and tactics. Ahimsa was the necessary complement to the concept of satyagraha which both limited it and, at the same time, made it something more than ‘purely and simply civil disobedience’. Ahimsa was the rule for concretizing the ‘truth’ of satyagraha. (107)

Ahimsa was the concept which gave Gandhism its theory of politics, “enabling it to become the ideology of a national political movement” (107). It became the organizing principle for a ‘science’ of politics, which was the “science of
non-violence,” the “science of love,” while all existing conceptions of politics led to the “sciences of violence” (107). This science of non-violence deals with the conditions for becoming a political satyagrahi, his conduct in the society and in politics, his relations with his leaders and with the masses, issues about the lines of command and decision making, political tactics and strategies, the conditions and problems involved with making and breaking laws. Similar to the “sciences of violence,” this “science of non-violence” is also a science of political struggle, a military science too, but infinitely superior, since it is the “science not of arms but of the moral force of the soul” (Chatterjee 107).

This science of politics, organized on the principles of Ahimsa, is no longer a utopian conception. It admits practical political difficulties and does not expect collective consensus in making decisions. “A few true satyagrahis” will take decisions and this method is more efficient and economic than that of the “sciences of violence” (Chatterjee 108). In the case of such mass political action the masses themselves are not expected to comprehend all its principles or their implications. The only condition is that they have to trust and obey their commander. When the concept of ahimsa is applied in the political field, everyone is not expected to accept it as a creed. For Gandhi it is a creed with religious implications but he wants the Congress to use it as a political weapon, to be used for the solution of practical problems.
Thus, while Gandhian ideology evolved with the evolution of the national movement, within its unity was detected, “a disjuncture between morality and politics, between private conscience and public responsibility, indeed between Noble Folly and Realpolitik. It was a disjuncture which the experimental conception of ahimsa was meant to bridge” (Chatterjee 108). Even though in Hind Swaraj Gandhi vehemently denied the existence of this disjuncture, he now began to admit that personal religion could be separated from political programme. For Gandhi, spinning wheel was closely related to his spiritual salvation, but for others he could allow it to be separated from its spiritual association and be employed as a political weapon for attaining freedom and economic development of the country. Thus Gandhi would admit the double significance of the spinning wheel.

Chatterjee opines that during the time of the Dandi March in 1930, Gandhi was more interested in the means to achieve the ends of democracy. He exhorted the people to use the way of non-violence and truth and to avoid the alternative, fraud and force. It was not important whether one could succeed or fail to reach the goal by resorting strictly to non-violent means. The political leader’s prime responsibility was to uphold the principles of morality.

Once Gandhi recognized the possibility of disjuncture, he could trace the reason for political failure to the loftiness of the ideal which made it inaccessible for the common man or to the inherent weakness of man; either it
was an impossible ideal or the human agency was imperfect. Gandhi preferred to admit his imperfections than accept that his principles were unworkable. So the quest for the ideal must take into consideration inevitable human failures and frailties, adjustments and compromises. A political leader’s authority was not derived from the validity of his programme or compatibility of his project with collective interests. He derived his authority from the moral qualities of personal courage, sacrifice and truthfulness. So the ultimate test for a political leader was death itself. Gandhi claims: “If the satyagrahis meet with death, it will put a seal upon their claim” (Collected Works 43: 93).

Even though in the political ideology of Gandhism there were contradictions between the ideal and the practical, they were ‘reconciled’ or made compatible by submitting to the principles of truthfulness and self-sacrifice of the satyagrahi. Chatterjee opines: “It had gained its strength from an intensely powerful moral critique of the existing state of politics. In the end it saved its Truth by escaping from politics” (110).

Partha Chatterjee discusses the impact of Gandhian ideology on Indian politics. Gandhism took the form of “the science of non-violence” (110) when it approached the problematic of nationalism. It was expected to meet all the issues of national politics, reinstating the active historical position of the state after freeing it from foreign yoke, framing its political organization and the nature and principles of its struggle. Gandhism proved its historical
effectiveness by providing, “for the first time in Indian politics, an ideological basis for including the whole people within the political nation” (110). Bridging the barriers that divided the people in a complex agrarian society, Gandhi sought constructive means to incorporate the peasants, including the Harijans, in the national movement.

The ideological means to unite the whole people had to be sought and it had to be executed within a specific and historically given political structure and process. Chatterjee comments:

And here it was the ‘experimental’ conception of truth, combining the absolute moral legitimacy of satyagraha with the tactical considerations of ahimsa, which made the Gandhian ideology into a powerful instrument in the historical task of constructing the new Indians state. (111).

Gandhi did not believe that freedom could be obtained for the masses through parliamentary work, but he did not want to forbid the congressmen from entering legislature. Even on the face of such compromises in the field of practical politics, one could not deny the truth of the moral conception of his utopia. Gandhi affirms: “Swaraj can only come through an all-round consciousness of the masses” (*Collected Works* 58: 11).

While Gandhism offered the ideal concept of property as trust, Gandhi was aware of its inherent limitation and that it might remain as true in theory
only. “You may say that trusteeship is a legal fiction. . . . Absolute trusteeship is an abstraction like Euclid’s definition of a point, and is equally unattainable” (*Gandhi Reader* 241). But Gandhi expressed faith in the concept, which for him was capable of realizing equality, compared to other theories. There were occasions when Gandhi uncharacteristically resorted to some simple and unreasonable cultural essentialisms of Orientalist thought, like, when he said that India was inherently a peaceful country. These contradictions symbolised the strange relationship Gandhism had with the thematic and problematic of nationalist thought. Chatterjee wants to record Gandhi’s momentous contribution to the nationalist politics of India as the moment of manoeuvre in the “passive revolution of capital” in India, that is, “the development of the thesis by incorporating a part of the antithesis” (51). The possibility of manoeuvre could be recognised in the conflicts and contradictions within Gandhism, in its paradoxical and ambiguous relation with the nationalist thought, and in the way in which it questioned the basic premises of nationalist thought and at the same time tried to intervene in the nationalist politics.

Chatterjee says that it was because of the awareness of the disjunction and lack of compatibility between the moral dimension of Gandhian politics and the general conception of power “within a bourgeois constitutional order” (113), that Gandhism suggested a specific political practice which was truthful
and principled even though imperfect and flexible. Even after gaining independence, the honest political practice of a diehard servant of the Congress was to continue the struggle towards the ideal rather than taking up the responsibilities of the new state. We can attain true non-violent swaraj only “by pursuing the programme of rural construction” (113). Only “political swaraj” could be achieved through “the parliamentary programme” (113). But there were contradictions and vagueness in his opinions, as is evident when he was approached for advice by his associates in the constructive work programme. They had been instructed by the Congress to join the government. Gandhi reminded them of the importance of non-attachment and silence. He did not try to prevent them from contesting in elections but advised them not to beg for votes or spend money. But Gandhi conceded that the members of legislature could teach people to protest against the misdeeds of the government. They were also valuable in the sense that they could prevent undesirable legislations and assist in the designing and implementation of useful laws which ultimately would benefit the constructive programme (Collected Works 83: 95-96). In spite of his concession regarding the Congressmen’s role in the parliamentary democracy, he could consider only one positive role for the national government—the assistance and support it could extent for the constructive programme. Through this constructive programme the government must provide materials to the villagers at cost
price, which could be recovered in easy installments, so that they could manufacture clothes and other necessary things. Thus the villages, which were dead or dying, could be made self-sufficient and alive (*Collected Works*: 84: 44-45). The government should also provide help in the areas like the preservation of cattle wealth and the spread of basic education. Honest and committed bureaucrats should be selected and given guidance under such organisations as the All India Spinners Association and All India Village Industries Association.

Thus Gandhi, to a certain extent, would recognise a specific role for the state in the programme of national construction. But he would not agree that the state was the right agency to implement this programme. On the contrary, his opinion was that the national state should use its legislative powers to give up its duty of promoting development, paving way for popular non-state agencies to shoulder the work of reviving village economies. But the nationalist state leadership could not agree with this. They argued that if the state abandoned its controlling role in the national economy, it would only further economic exploitation by powerful vested interests. Faced with this argument Gandhi only emphasised the claims of his moral conception. Now, that the political *swaraj* had been virtually won, it was necessary that the relation between the nation and the state was redefined. According to Chatterjee, for the last few years Gandhi had unwillingly complied with the
“political compulsions of bourgeois politics,” and now the only thing he desired was to resume his work for utopia or “true swaraj” which was different from “political swaraj” (115). It was the ideal of Ramarajya that he strove for and it epitomized moral, political and economic independence. Gandhi defined political independence as escaping the control of British armed force, and economic independence as freedom from British and Indian capitalists and capital in general. For Gandhi moral independence meant freedom from armed defense forces of all kinds (Collected Works: 84: 80-81).

Gandhi’s ideal was a stateless society and he insisted that one should not be bothered about its feasibility. People’s duty was to work for it and their attempt would surely become fruitful in future, if not now. It was Gandhi’s belief that such a stateless society could be established first in India (Collected Works 85: 266-267). When the Congress leadership insisted on the administration of the nation employing its repressive instruments, Gandhi saw the use of violence as a moral failure on their part (Collected Works 87: 513). He felt helpless in the midst of communal strife as no one listened to him anymore. The Congressmen should not talk about truth and non-violence as long as they used armed forces to govern and should not claim to follow “peaceful and legitimate” (Collected Works: 85: 266) means. No nation could be completely free as long it resorted to violence.
While Gandhism stressed the importance of remaining faithful to its political ideal it was not able to stipulate the method of translating it into a feasible political practice. For Partha Chatterjee, this was the most irredeemable contradiction faced by Gandhism. On the face of the disinterestedness shown by powerful forces to the Gandhian ideal, the ideology could not pinpoint a social force which would continue the struggle and get the better of this resistance.

According to Chatterjee Gandhi began to have second thoughts about khadi programme. In 1944 he proposed a “New Khadi Philosophy,” (117) rejecting the old policy which adhered to only practical considerations and had completely overlooked the true spirit which should have guided the khadi programme. So far the programme had focused upon providing additional employment and income to the poor villagers and consequently sold much of the cloth they produced in the cities. Gandhi found this practice as going against “the fundamental objective of the khadi philosophy which was to create an economic order in which the direct producer would not have to depend on anyone else for his basic necessities” (Chatterjee 117). The work, which was done solely to sell the products to the khadi organizations, was founded on wrong economic principles. Gandhi asserts: “An economics which runs counter to morality cannot be called true economics” (Collected Works 78: 174).
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Gandhi related the morality of khadi programme to the moral conception of *swaraj*, and could not allow the principles of marketplace to be applied to its economics. If khadi was regarded as another industry there could be no justification in giving it preference over mill cloth. The conception of khadi as an industry negated its claim to be the herald of swaraj. The real significance of khadi was that it was a means for improving the condition of villages and subsequently the people would be inspired with the need for swaraj. Gandhi wanted to support khadi because “it is the only way to redeem the people from the disease of inertia and indifference, the only way to generate in them the strength of freedom” (*Collected Works* 78: 192-3). Gandhi did not want to do anything with the practical argument about the economic benefits of khadi and instead asserted its moral objectives. He could not accept the argument that decentralization was accomplished through work carried out in village homes since cloth was made not for their own use but to be sold.

Gandhi wanted the whole process to be revised. Producing cloth for sale had to be stopped immediately. The people had to be persuaded and taught to spin for their own use. The villagers should desist from depending on the market. The system of producing yarn on payment of wages and using that money to buy mill made cloth had to be discontinued. Gandhi argues: “To make khadi the instrument for attaining *purna swaraj*, it would have to be
extricated from the cycle of money exchange; the only currency which could be permitted in the buying and selling of khadi was yarn" (Collected Works 81: 137).

Chatterjee believes that Gandhi’s insistence on change in the khadi programme could be explained against the background of the “historical conjuncture” (119), which Indian nationalist movement had reached. This historical moment was characterised by a general expectation of the transition of power. The Congress leadership, expecting to be handed over the power, was concerned about formulating a programme of national development. The people, anticipating the breakdown of a central order, had established localized centres of rebel authority. Gandhi too anticipated this power change, but he could not accept either the Congress leaders’ development plans to build a modern industrial nation or the plan of armed rebellion by insurgent groups. He expected the transition of power to create new possibilities. He wanted to initiate a new programme of economic reconstruction which would make it possible for the small-scale producers to become self-sufficient without getting involved in “the large scale commodity exchange or sale of labour” (120). This had been his original intention before he yielded to practical considerations. Gandhi felt the need for changing the track and resuming the original work. He wanted the ‘national state leadership’ to give up its plans and power in the area of social development and entrust popular
agencies with the task of economic reconstruction. If this was made possible it was imperative such agencies were set up and the volunteers given training. But if the national state was not willing to give up its coercive authority, the struggle must continue, defying that authority and also opposing the interests of the capitalists. Now that the political swaraj was imminent, it could form the basis of the struggle for real swaraj if the political leadership was willing to participate. Even if the state did not co-operate Gandhi was ready to go on with the struggle and the original task of Gandhism was sharply differentiated from the narrow, peripheral concerns and objectives of nationalism.

The new khadi programme would lead a struggle which could forge a broader plan for the reconstruction of rural economy embracing the activities of the whole village, the decentralisation of power in the society being the original and declared intention. The centralisation of power in the hands of the state was necessitated by the introduction of modern industry. Gandhi wanted the new khadi programme to spearhead the struggle for ‘real swaraj’ which would also include decentralization. Decentralization would ensure the self-sufficiency of each individual with regard to his essential needs. In the case of non-essentials he had to co-operate with others; not by getting involved with the market of exchange, “but in the way in which members of a family help one another” (Collected Works 81: 133).
In the decentralization programme, since freedom should begin at bottom, the basic unit was the village, which would become self-sufficient in economic matters and even in affairs of administration and defence. In the village each individual should try to be as self-sufficient as possible and accept only free and voluntary co-operation from others. Gandhi wanted the society to be organized in the form of expanding circles beyond the unit of the self-sufficient village, a group of villages, the taluka, the district, the province, and so on, each self-reliant in its own terms, no unit having to depend on the larger unit or dominate the smaller one (Collected Works 85: 459-60). According to Chatterjee this was an ideal construction and the success of the attempt to reach the ideal depended on “the selflessness, courage, and moral will of the leaders of the people” (122).

Chatterjee argues that we cannot turn a blind eye to the many imperfections of Gandhism as a political ideology. It had no political answer to the problem regarding the conflict between the interests of the capitalists and the claims of khadi. Gandhi had no doubt about the necessity of implementing the new khadi programme, but at the same time he had to admit that some important industries could not be avoided. Gandhi did not have any concrete solution to the problem of avoiding corrupt and petty village officials from panchayats. Against his own policy, Gandhi had no faith in the
institution of representative government, he would suggest the method of election by secret ballot for forming self-government in the villages.

Despite its imperfections and contradictions, Chatterjee argues, the real contributions of Gandhism cannot be ignored. Gandhism began with the utopian concepts expressed in *Hind Swaraj*, but later incorporated nationalist ideology and thus made it historically possible for the peasantry, “the largest popular element of the nation . . . be appropriated within the evolving political forms of the new Indian state” (124). According to Chatterjee it was the agreement between Gandhi’s concept of *Ramarajya* and the nature and demands of political justice in the peasant consciousness which made the translation of these demands into “the message of the Mahatma” possible (125). Gandhian politics of non-violence gave the process of peasant appropriation its moral justification and its own distinctive ideological form. Gandhi’s interference in the Indian elite nationalist politics established the fact that only the organised support of the peasant class would generate a genuine national movement.

Chatterjee writes that many national leaders, especially Nehru, were surprised by the spontaneity with which the peasants would organise the agitation against the authority. But these agitations often turned violent since, in their excited state, they could easily be misled, and to control them on such occasions was not an easy task, even for a leadership which had their trust.
This unpredictability on the side of the peasants and the lack of comprehension on the part of the leaders led the leadership to agree with the conception that the peasants were poor, ignorant and easily excited and that there should be responsible leaders to lead and control them so that they would be incorporated into the national movement. A feasible course of action was to give prominence to agrarian issues in the national movement and to convince the peasants that only in a truly national state their grievances would be properly addressed.

But difficulty to reach peasant consciousness using bourgeois rationality was established by the course taken by many peasant upheavals. Chatterjee says: “To turn the springs of localized and spontaneous resistance by the peasantry into the broad stream of the national struggle for political freedom was the task of the organized national movement. Yet the task could never be accomplished by acting according to the rational principles of political organization” (150). To Nehru the Communist Party in India faced the same problem when they failed to mobilise the peasantry as they approached the economic and social situation in India from the perspective of the Labour situation in Europe and did not realize that mere ideological logic was not enough with regard to the implementation of socialism in India where peasants formed the major part of the population. To mobilize and manage the peasantry in a national movement, a rational programme highlighting agrarian
issues was needed, but what was more essential was the mediation of a political genius.

Gandhi was a perfect mediator who could work magic among the masses and Chatterjee argues that Nehru felt himself incompetent to understand and explain the enigma of the Mahatma. Unlike other political leaders Gandhi had an instinctual perception of the masses, and could relate to them with ease and had the rare and almost magical talent of acting at the most effective moment. Even though Nehru felt that most of Gandhi’s political and economic ideas were archaic and ineffectual and that Gandhi himself was a reactionary, he had to admit that this “reactionary” (525) understood India to the extent that he himself was India. He was able to influence and effect changes as no one else could. Nehru felt that Gandhi’s appeal could not be explained by logic or reason:

Whether his audience consisted of one person or a thousand, the charm and magnetism of the man passed on to it, and each one had a feeling of communion with the speaker. This feeling had little to do with the mind, though the appeal to the mind was not wholly ignored. . . . It was the utter sincerity of the man and his personality that gripped; he gave the impression of tremendous inner reserves of power. Perhaps also it was a tradition that had grown up about him which helped in creating
a suitable atmosphere. A stranger, ignorant of this tradition and not in harmony with the surroundings, would probably not have been touched by that spell, or, at any rate, not to the same extent. (138)

Trying to account for the tradition that grew up around Gandhi, Nehru felt that it was related to his positive attitude towards religion which gave him a spiritual authority. But the fact that Gandhi’s politics had revolutionary consequences negated this conjecture. However much he admired Gandhi as a unique leader, Nehru felt that sometimes his language was beyond comprehension to an average modern Indian, even as that language could easily reach the hearts of the masses. Nehru says: “Even some of Gandhiji’s phrases sometimes jarred upon me- thus his frequent reference to Rama Raj as a golden age which was to return. But I was powerless to intervene, and I consoled myself with the thought that Gandhiji used the words because they were well known and understood by the masses” (79). Nehru knew that a successful national movement demanded the participation of all sections of society, especially the peasants. As the immediate political objective of the national movement was self-government, the whole hearted involvement of the peasantry was requisite which would be realized only by gaining their trust. Hence, despite his many fads and oddities, Gandhi had to be given a free hand, at least for the time being, as his rare knack for reaching out to the
masses gave him power while the other leaders were clueless as to how to intervene. Nehru says:

As for Gandhijii himself, he was a very difficult person to understand, sometimes his language was almost incomprehensible to an average modern. But we felt that we knew him quite well enough to realize that he was a great and unique man and a glorious leader, and having put our faith in him we gave him an almost blank check, for the time being at least. (79)

Chatterjee recognizes in Nehru’s analysis a differentiation between two specific political spheres, that of the elite and that of the subaltern classes. Chatterjee argues:

And so the split between two domains of politics – one, a politics of the elite, and the other, a politics of the subaltern classes – was replicated in the sphere of mature nationalist thought by an explicit recognition of the split between a domain of rationality and a domain of unreason, a domain of science and a domain of faith, a domain of organization and a domain of spontaneity. But it was a rational understanding which, by the very act of its recognition of the Other, also effaced the Other. (153)
Assigned to the domain of unreason, peasant consciousness remained incomprehensible in elite rational terms and thus it was acknowledged as the other. Gandhi was a political genius, who was able to relate to this consciousness through his rare and instinctual skill.

Even though Gandhi’s genius was designated to the territory of the incognizable, the consequences of his mediation were intelligible and hence, could be adapted. “Thus the Gandhian intervention,” Partha Chatterjee contends, “though its fundamental nature was incomprehensible, was worthy of approval because it was functional in its consequences” (153). The consequences, Chatterjee asserts, thus became incorporated into the rational and linear progression of history. This notion of functionality had helped to mark out three definite stages in this linear progress of the history of Indian nationalist movement. In the first stage, all preparations are made to understand and incorporate the other domain coinciding with an awareness concerning its relevance in the national movement. In the next stage, the great and ‘unique’ leader is given a ‘blank cheque’ to win the trust of the other domain. In the third and the final stage the consequences of this intervention is appropriated by the ‘real’ domain and it regains control of the political process (154).

Chatterjee asserts that Nehru realized the efficacy of Gandhi’s intervention in transforming the character of the nationalist movement (155).
His mobilization of the peasants gave the appearance of a massive agrarian organisational front to the national movement with a smattering of the middle classes. The English educated elite were forced to acknowledge the existence and relevance of the poor peasants. Nehru “A reader of the newspapers would hardly imagine that a vast peasantry and millions of workers existed in India or had any importance” (53). They were a dumb and blind mass resigned to their fate and silently suffering their exploitation. What Gandhi triggered was a great psychological revolution. He became the representative of peasant masses; more than that, he became the “idealised personification of those vast millions” (266). But Nehru realized that Gandhi with his astute intellect and intense vision, fine taste and feelings was a real human being and at the same time displayed qualities of an ascetic by reigning in his passions and emotions, transcending ordinary peasantry. Gandhi had a peasant’s perspective, and India being peasant’s India, he could understand her very well, “and reacts to her lightest tremors, and gauges a situation accurately and almost instinctively, and has a knack of acting at the psychological moment” (266).

According to Nehru India was the perfect and ideal location for a leader like Gandhi, with his spiritual and prophetic approach to politics. To many Indians Gandhi was a mythical figure, with his overwhelming inner power and intense energy. There were moments when Nehru and many other nationalist leaders, with their modern outlook, found Gandhi and his language beyond
comprehension and they would use the word magical to refer to the consequences of his words and acts. Nevertheless Nehru saw that his words were understood by the masses and that Gandhi “had an amazing knack of reaching the heart of the people” (79).

Chatterjee recognizes that Nehru interpreted Gandhi’s intervention as a necessary detour into the domain of unreason and the irrational in the otherwise rational path of real history. The goal of the new national state could be attained only through the practice of rational politics. The real course of history had to be separated from philosophy and the detour had to be understood as such, as a special domain, which had to be discarded, once its function, that of organising the peasants and bridging the gap between the elite and the masses, was accomplished.

Gandhi, according to Nehru, was excellent in his methods and also in the field of social reform. But his defect was that he had no definite historical objectives; he was concerned only with the present. For Nehru, Gandhi was a “philosophical anarchist” (532), and his philosophy was dispensable in the process of building a new national state. It was the task of the new nationalist leadership to make the progress towards the creation of this state, however deficient the preparations were. Chatterjee considers this as relegating Gandian intervention to the sidelines:
This was the epitaph, wondrous and yet condescending, put up on the grave of Gandhian politics by the nationalist leadership. The relentless thrust of its rationalist thematic turned the Gandhian intervention into a mere interlude in the unfolding of the real history of the nation. And thus it was that the political consequences of that intervention were fully appropriated within the monistic progression of real history. (157)

Champaran, Kheda, Bardoli and Borsad were the model peasant movements, especially that of Bardoli, as they were organised on issues that were local, particular and limited to their own specific problems. The people of Bardoli were afraid of the reprisal of the government and this prevented them from seeking and securing justice for themselves. By yielding themselves to their leader they were freed from this fear. Instead of physical or intellectual strength what was needed was moral courage which was derived from a natural faith in their leader. It was not that they accepted non-violence as a principle; they had realized its practical benefits.

Gandhi’s mediation in Indian politics and national movement became “the moment of manoeuvre in the passive revolution of the capital” (125), according to Chatterjee. And in its venture to evolve a new state structure, the Indian bourgeoisie reckoned Gandhian ideology as an effective tool. But, as Chatterjee reminds, there is inherent ambiguity in the logic of Utopia, so it is
inevitable that in the never ending class struggles within the societal construction of contemporary India the opposing movements can still lay their claim to the moral legitimacy of Gandhism (125).

In spite of its many ambiguities and contradictions, Gandhian ideology, with its commingling of politics, ethics and spirituality, played the most vital role in Indian independence movement, marking the arrival of ‘the moment of manoeuvre’ in the nationalist thought.

In the context of Gandhian nationalist movement and the instinctual involvement of common people including peasants in it, it is relevant to extend the concept of the multitude as envisaged by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in the backdrop of globalised imperial power, to the Indian Freedom struggle. In *Multitude: War and Democracy in the age of Empire*, Hardt and Negri examine the possibility of a global democracy. They reiterate the need for a democratic world which is “open and inclusive” (xi), and also make us aware of the challenges to this possibility, in the form of the permanent state of conflict in the world and the process of globalization.

The well acclaimed work *Empire*, prequel to *Multitude*, envisages the emergence of a new form of political order the Empire which is, as distinct from the imperialism based on the extension of sovereignty of a nation over foreign territory, a “network power” (xii), which may include prominent nation-states besides transnational institutions, leading capitalist concerns and
other powerful organisations. The present global order is maintained by the collaboration of these unequal powers within the network. The Empire dominates over a global system that is characterised by dissensions and hierarchies and harassed by incessant conflicts. In fact, conflict or war is unavoidable within Empire and serves as the agency for domination.

In *Empire* Hardt and Negri trace a pyramidal power structure while analysing the new global geopolitical order. The democratic representational bodies like UN General Assembly, NGOs and media which represent the ‘people’ in the global constitution, constitute the last tier of this pyramid. The people have ceased to be active and open and have become conservative and even reactionary. Ideally this democratic level should have been a multitude with its independent and constructive character; instead it has been shaped into a monolithic group of people by the Empire, transforming its multiplicity into a singular will. The multitude is the ‘other’ of the people, and has the revolutionary potential to effectuate democracy through mobilising what it shares in common against the Empire. But this resistance does not have an organized or centralized character; by nature it is disordered and disorganized. When the self-organization of the multitude reaches a saturation point a real event is triggered, upsetting the equilibrium of the Empire. As Hardt and Negri state, “The multitude is bio political self-organization. . . Certainly there must
be a moment when reappropriation and self-organization reach a threshold and configure a real event” (Empire 411).

Hardt and Negri refer to two aspects of globalization: first the Empire extends its network of ruptures, divisions and hierarchies globally, and exerts power and maintains order through new methods of control and a situation of perpetual war and secondly globalization becomes the output of coordination and cooperation extending globally and creating many encounters. To them the Multitude, which is “the living alternative within Empire,” can also be envisaged as a network, “an open and expansive network in which all differences can be expressed freely and equally, a network that provides the means of encounter so that we can work and live in common” (xiii-xiv). The multitude distinguishes itself from other notions of social subjects, such as the people, the masses and the working class, as an open, unrestricted, inclusive concept. The ‘people’ is characterised by a singular identity, where the diversity within the population is cancelled to create a unity. In the case of the masses, while the concept is distinguished by its diversity, all the differences are subsumed, resulting in an indifferent, unvarying assembly. The conception of the working class is defined by its exclusiveness, restricting itself to the workers, especially industrial workers. In contrast to all these concepts, the multitude is polymorphous, distinct yet inclusive:
The multitude is composed of innumerable internal differences that can never be reduced to a unity or single identity—different cultures, races, ethnicities, genders and sexual orientations; different forms of labour; different ways of living; different views of the world; and different desires. The multitude is a multiplicity of all these singular differences. . . . In the multitude, social differences remain different. The multitude is many-coloured, like Joseph’s magical coat. Thus the challenge posed by the concept of multitude is for a social multiplicity to manage to communicate and act in common while remaining internally different. (Multitude xiv)

The industrial working class has lost its dominance in the sphere of global economy. Production now has an extended sense of social production including the production of “communications, relationships, and forms of life,” (xv) along with material production. Multitude, encompassing all these changes in global economy, is capable of embracing the different elements of social production.

While discussing the role of multitude in the formation of global democracy, Hardt and Negri identify two of its characteristics which are particularly relevant. The first facet they refer to as economic and specify that since the multitude embodies internal differences, ‘the common’ which is
conducive to communication and concerted action, has to be found. This common that is discovered and shared will in turn generate the common too. Hardt and Negri contend: “Our communication, collaboration and cooperation are not only based on the common, but they in turn produce the common in an expanding spiral relationship” (xv). However restricted it is, the production of the common becomes vital to all forms of social production. The shift in economic field transforms the nature of labour too and it becomes encapsulated in collaborative and communicative networks. Hardt and Negri refer to this new model of production as “biopolitical production” (xvi), since it entails different aspects of social life, including political and cultural, besides economic. The second character of the multitude which is relevant to global democracy is its “political” (xvi) organization. The current forms of revolutions and resistances favour democratic organizations, revealing a shift “from centralized forms of revolutionary dictatorship and command to network organizations that displace authority in collaborative relationships” (xvi). These revolutionary organizations have double intentions: realizing democratic societies and creating democratic relationships within the organizational structure.

The multitude has the enormous potential to realize effective change. Hardt and Negri argue: “Political action aimed at transformation and liberation today can only be conducted on the basis of the multitude” (99). Different
from the ‘people,’ the multitude which consists of a collection of singularities, remains “plural and multiple” (99). Hardt and Negri explain the concept of singularities as “a social subject whose difference cannot be reduced to sameness, a difference that remains different” (99). But despite being endowed with a plural nature, the multitude is not divided, chaotic or incoherent, thus differentiating itself from the crowd, the masses and the mob, which are indifferent, essentially passive and easily manipulated. The multitude is active and distinct. Hardt and Negri explain:

The multitude designates an active social subject, which acts on the basis of what the singularities share in common. The multitude is an internally different, multiple social subject whose constitution and action is based not on identity or unity (or, much less, indifference) but on what it has in common.

(100)

This concept of the multitude challenges the traditional notion of the sovereignty which claims that the social subjects that remain multiple cannot govern themselves, but must be governed. Contrary to the established notion of political body where one rules and all the others are ruled, the multitude is capable of ruling itself and has thus become the sole social subject with the potential to effectuate democracy.
Defining multitude as a commingling of singularity and commonality, that is, a multiplicity of singular forms of life sharing a common global existence, Hardt and Negri examine the conditions of possibility and the nature of political project for the formation of the multitude. They point out that the sense of hostility provoked by exploitation, hierarchical divisions and attempts to control and dominate the common, and the surplus associated with the production of the common that cannot be appropriated by capital or global political body are the harbingers of the multitude. It is on the basis of this surplus that hostility is reconstructed into revolt. This revolt occurs not because of privation or lack, but on the basis of a surplus, “a surplus of intelligence, experience, knowledge and desire” (Multitude 212). Resistances against capital and global political body and struggles of the multitude are founded on this common surplus.

Hardt and Negri touch on the intensive and extensive aspects of the mobilization of the common produced by revolts:

Intensively, internal to each local struggle, the common antagonism and common wealth of the exploited and expropriated are translated into common conduct, habits, and performativity. Any time you enter a region where there is a strong revolt forming you are immediately struck by the common manners of dress, gestures and modes of relating and
communicating. . . . These elements of style, however, are only symptoms of the common dreams, common desires, common ways of life, and common potential that are mobilized in a movement. This new common mode of life always forms in dialogue with local traditions and habits. (213)

This mobilization gives a new intensity to the common and this intensity produces fundamental modifications to create a new humanity out of the struggle.

In its extensive aspect the mobilization of the common occurs in a network from one local struggle to another through the transmission of common practices and desires. Hardt and Negri place the anti-colonial struggles in Asia, Africa and Latin America, that materialized in the twentieth century, as examples. In these struggles it is not just the enemy that is common; the methods of resistance are also common. There are common modes of living and common aspirations for an improved world.

The freedom struggle in India, could be re-read as the uprising of the multitude based on common dreams and desires. As Partha Chatterjee has suggested, it was Gandhi who established the common among the elite nationalists and the ordinary people and the peasants, referred to as the moment of manoeuvre, thus giving freedom struggle the dimensions of the resistance of the multitude. The events of the freedom struggle also draw
parallels with the resistance envisaged by Hardt and Negri; they are natural and inevitable products of the active and decentralised struggles of the multitude. Even the agrarian revolutions had a naturalness and spontaneity to them. Nehru’s comment on the uprising in Oudh is a case in point: “What was surprising to me then was that this should have developed quite spontaneously without any city help or intervention of politicians and the like” (60). Even though his intention was different—to make the marginalised sections of the society self-reliant—Gandhi’s insistence on spinning wheel and khadi inadvertently gave a common appearance to the participants of the freedom struggle. In the nationalist movement we find one local struggle spreading to another locality in resistance to a common enemy, the oppressive coloniser.

In an India which was divided on the basis of caste, class, religion, language and ethnicity, Gandhi’s mediation acted as a unifying factor, bridging the emotional and cultural gap between the different sections of Indian community and producing a common of the peasants, untouchables, minorities women, the elite and the middle class, and awakening a sense of national spirit all over the nation. Under his leadership Indian National Congress became a “political Noah’s ark” (31), to borrow from Mukul Kesavan. Negating the logic of the political concept that no nation could be created without war Gandhi was instrumental in forging a new nation without armed conflict and through nonviolent methods, thus setting a model to the
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many emerging nations. Just as the methods of resistance are different, the political nature of the new nation is also unique. Guha avers that it is “different and distinct from alternative political models such as Anglo-Saxon liberalism, French republicanism, aesthetic communism and Islamic theocracy” (758). Here too Gandhi’s signature is evident as he had always upheld pluralism and secularism. Indian Independence struggle could be regarded as a narrative of the multitude, with Gandhi as the decisive force which triggered the event leading to the success of the uprising. He is also the ‘common’, for the different sections of the community working towards a singular goal, without losing their distinctive identities.

It is pertinent here to reflect on two recent political uprisings which demonstrated the relevance of nonviolent resistances even today. The Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong demanding universal suffrage, which began as a series of sit in street protests, in December 2014, exhibited the basic characteristics of the resistance of the multitude. The movement began without any deliberate preparation, and proceeded in a decentralised fashion, without a controlling authority to lead the protesters. It was a civil disobedience campaign and the name given to one of the groups involved in the protest, ‘Occupy Central with Love and Peace’ suggests the non-violent nature of the movement. What was more striking were the yellow ribbons worn by the protesters and the sympathisers demonstrating their support to the
movement. Another object which was used by many of the protestors, and gave the movement its name, was the umbrella. These symbols, which gave a common appearance to the movement, linked it with the resistance of the multitude. The spontaneous and decentralized revolution in Egypt, against President Hosni Mubarak too attests to the success of the nonviolent struggle of the multitude.

The Arab Spring or Democracy Spring, which took off in Tunisia in December 2010 with the Tunisian revolution, also has parallels with the non-violent uprising of the multitude with the revolution spreading from Tunisia to the countries of the Arab League. Gradually the upheavals advanced to the countries like Algeria, Iran, Sudan, Kuwait, and to a very limited extend to Saudi Arabia too. Even when these insurgencies were not always non-violent they recall the slow but spontaneous spread of the revolt of the multitude.

Indian novelists, writing in 1930s and 1940s in English, definitely came under the influence of the Mahatma as the dominating figure of the national movement. As Srinivasa Iyengar comments:

Life could not be the same as before, and every segment of our national life – politics, economics, education, religion, social life, language and literature – acquired a more or less pronounced Gandhian hue. Thus it was that Gandhi exercised a potent influence on our languages and literatures, both directly
through his own writings in English and Gujarati and indirectly through the movements generated by his revolutionary thought and practice. (248-249)

Realizing the significance of inculcating a sense of unity in a yet to be born nation state, which would be diverse and multifaceted, these writers, especially Raja Rao, acknowledged the relevance and importance of the Mahatma as the focal point of the freedom struggle. These novelists prioritized a representation of India breathing in unison, beyond the differences of language, caste, class and gender with its people joining to form one united front in resistance to the colonial rule. English, though alien and the language of the colonizer, was the common language of the upper class elite who led the struggle. In India, with its diverse linguistic communities, English served as a lingua franca among the educated. Thus the idea of the nation was constructed in this alien language in the early stages of the freedom struggle.

The novels of Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K.Narayan testify to the upsurge of mass movements from 1920s to 1940s, and to the aura of the Mahatma, which was the common and dominant factor of these upheavals. Writing in the midst of the political turmoil, Raja Rao and Anand could not ignore the diverse facets of the national movement and had to capture, in their fiction, the various dimensions of the impact of the Mahatma. In Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* and Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable* the Mahatma’s political and
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social presence is unequivocally evident, his aura distinctly established in the particular context along with the urgency of the national movement. In R.K.Narayan’s *Waiting for the Mahatma*, written in the background of the Quit India Movement of 1940s, his aura is unmistakably palpable, but is more emphasized on the social and personal levels. Shashi Tharoor’s *Great Indian Novel*, traces the decline in the Mahatma’s aura in the political sphere even as his charismatic presence in the early stages of the freedom movement is asserted. The rare political genius of the Mahatma in uniting the multitude is reflected in all these novels which is also a testimony to Partha Chatterjee’s interpretation of the Mahatma’s intervention as the moment of manoeuvre.

While colonialists like Sir John Stratchey could not even conceive the idea of a unified, single nation with regard to India, it fell to the lot of Anglophone writers in 1930s and 40s to narrate the image of a nation and kindle the spirit of nationalism among the millions in the subcontinent. E.V.Ramakrishnan confirms:

> The origin of the Indian novel in the second half of the nineteenth century coincided with the rise of nationalism as an ideology in the public sphere. The two discourses intermingled and, to some extent, even reinforced each other. . . . Moreover the novel became the site where multiple discourses of nationhood become visible for examination. (12-13)
These texts, as Anderson would aver, contributed to the imagining of the Indian nation, highlighting its unity in its variety. The resistances delineated in these novels, against a common enemy, springing from the different sections of the society and maintaining a common front without losing their cultural and communal identities, have the appearance of the resistance of the multitude. Placing these novels in the specificity of their historical and social milieu and analysing the power relations which determine the representation of the Mahatma in these texts will be conducive to a profound understanding of the various interpretations of the Mahatma. Similarly a study of the construction of the Mahatma’s image and its reception after independence, especially in mass media, is also relevant vis-a-vis his aura and its re-readings in recent history.

Chapter one of this thesis introduces the concepts of aura, imagined communities, multitude and the moment of manoeuvre which have informed the analysis of the Mahatma’s interpretation in the respective texts discussed in the project. The prominent Gandhian tenets are also examined, which had influenced the national movement and went into the shaping of the Mahatma’s image and the building up of his popularity.

Chapter two presents new historicist methodology which has been employed in this project to trace the construction of the Mahatma in the various texts, documents, and other social and cultural expressions and its
reception from early twentieth century to the present day. Just as all texts are influenced by the discursive practices of the contingent culture they in turn manipulate the culture, in a two way process. The new historicist concepts of power relations and the inter-changeability of the text and the context have animated this study which attempts the interpretation of the Mahatma in the selected novels.

Chapter three analyses the portrayal of the Mahatma in the novels *Kanthapura, Untouchable, Waiting for the Mahatma* and *The Great Indian Novel*. Two of Raja Rao’s short stories “The Cow of the Barricades” and “Narsiga” are also discussed in the chapter. The pre-independence novels and other print media which have fore-grounded the Mahatma had been influential in awakening the nationalist consciousness in colonial India. The part played by the Mahatma’s aura in incorporating the masses in the national movement, as narrated in these novels, is analyzed. The study also engages the representation of the Mahatma’s intervention in the national movement as the moment of manoeuvre, in the novels. The fictional texts are shown to illuminate the discourses and power structures of Indian society have which shaped the image of the Mahatma and in the process underline the reciprocity of the text and the context.

Chapter four analyzes the presence of the Mahatma in contemporary mass media like films, advertisement, newspapers and internet. Dislodged
from the original context of the freedom struggle the Mahatma is relentlessly deconstructed and his image put to acid tests, even as his aura is still powerful albeit in a circumscribed and apolitical way.

The thesis educes the conclusion that the image of the Mahatma has always been historically and politically constructed. The representation and interpretation of the Mahatma in the fictional texts are determined by the power relations and hegemonic structures in the society. Reciprocally, the discursive practices in the society are also informed by the literary texts. The novels discussed in the study showcase how Gandhi, the political figure, has been constructed through the narrative. As the project intends to focus more on the literary reconstruction of Gandhi, the fictional texts are preferred over the non-literary. Greenblatt, who has rejected the separation between the text and the context, focused on Shakespeare’s plays to reconstruct the Elizabethan age. All popular figures are constructed through mass media, newspapers, advertisements, documentaries, public debates and political polemics. The Mahatma has been appropriated and has been given re-presentation, by the mass media, advertisements featuring him to sell products and public debates and polemics on his philosophy.