Indian history has seen some extraordinary reformers who not only established the very foundation of modern India but also made an impact on the world with their philosophy and great work for the society. India is privileged to have number of great souls like Dayanand Saraswati and Raja Ram Mohan Roy. They managed to bring revolutions by making radical changes in the society. Some of the reformers took up the challenges of breaking the jinx of prevailing caste-system while some fought for the introduction of girls'-education and widow remarriage.

The nineteenth-century reform movement became closely conjoined to a political movement, and consequently sought to influence political authority, administration, and legislation. This political movement eventually became an all-India nationalist movement. Whereas previously social reform was inextricably interwoven with religious motivation and improvement, in the nineteenth century, the relationship of the two fluctuated, and sometimes secular and rationalistic motives were the decisive ones. Majority of the 18th and 19th century India attacked and shook the very foundations of Vedic religion and unsocial practices that had crept in India and asked the people to totally discard them and reform them on western lines of modernization. It were, Swami Dayanand Saraswati,
Vivekananda and Gandhiji who drew their philosophy, thought and practices primarily from the real Vedas, Vedangas and Upanishats. They taught the real messages of the holy scriptures of Hinduism and asked the masses to leave up the superstitions and blind belief.

Mahatma Gandhi was the primary leader of Indian Freedom Movement a pioneer of Satyagraha, or resistance through mass non-violent civil disobedience, Satyagraha is a particular philosophy and practice within the broader overall category generally known as nonviolent resistance or civil resistance. Gandhiji described Satyagrah as the weapon of the strong, it admits of no violence under any circumstances whatsoever, and it ever insists upon truth. Satyagraha remained one of the most potent philosophies in freedom struggles throughout the world today.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born in 1869 in Porbandar, an Indian seaside-town north of Bombay now Gujarat. Gandhiji’s full name was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Young Gandhi had his primary education up to the seventh year at Porbandar. Then his education continued at Rajkot. A timid child, he was married at thirteen to a girl of the same age, Kasturbai. Following the death of his father, Gandhi’s family sent him to England in 1888 to study law. There, he became interested in the philosophy of nonviolence, as expressed in the Bhagavad-Gita, Hindu sacred scripture, and in Jesus Christ’s Sermon on the Mount in the
Christian Bible. He returned to India in 1891, having passed the bar, but found little success in his attempts to practice law. Seeking a change of scenery, he accepted a position in South Africa for a year, where he assisted on a lawsuit.

Once he had to make a journey by train, so he bought a first-class ticket. During the journey, an officer of the railway asked him to vacate his seat for a white man, and to move to the van on the train. Mahatma Gandhi refused. The railway officials, with the help of the police, had his things thrown out. He was also removed from the carriage by force. Thus, Gandhiji was subject to untold shame. This incident transformed him. Gandhi started an organisation and called it 'The Natal Indian Congress'. It was to carry on the struggle of the Indians against racial discrimination. He also started a newspaper called 'The Indian Opinion'. The paper became an organ to give information about the struggle. Mahatma Gandhi stayed on in South Africa for nearly 21 years to fight against racial discrimination against Indian settlers. He propagated the concept of Satyagraha (satya means truth and agraha firmness). It was the use of 'Soul-Force' against 'Brute-Force' or violence. He trained men, women and children as volunteers. He called his band a 'Peace Brigade'. He won his battle when, finally, the South African Government gave in to his demands. Gandhi now became a world-renowned person. He soon earned the title of 'Mahatma'
Gandhiji came back to India in 1915 and built an ashram on the banks of the Sabaramati river near Ahmadabad. It was called 'Satyagraha Ashram'. The way of life that he practised there was known as 'Sarvodaya' the well-being of all. He fought peacefully for many causes and succeeded in persuading the government to abolish many abuses against labourers in Bihar, the Kaira peasants in Gujarat, etc and developed the term satyagraha and applied it on Mass base of Indian politics.

Satyagrah is a term comprising two words; satya or truth, and agrah or insistence. Hence, in its loose English interpretation, satyagrah means insistence on truth. In practice, however, satyagrah transpired into non-violent resistance, passive resistance or civil resistance as a form of mass protest against the State. Gandhiji sometimes also referred to it as truth force or soul force. The practice was so successful in the Indian independence movement that Martin Luther King Jr. emulated it for the American Civil Rights Movement, and so did Nelson Mandela to protest against South African apartheid.

However, as the notion of satyagrah and its practice advanced, it started getting increasingly decoupled from its equation with passive resistance. A stage came when they no more remained synonyms. Gandhiji
himself drew clear distinction between the two terms in his book Satyagrah in South Africa in 1928:

“Truth (satya) implies love, and firmness (agraha) engenders and therefore serves as a synonym for force. I thus began to call the Indian movement Satyagraha, that is to say, the Force which is born of Truth and Love or nonviolence, and gave up the use of the phrase ‘passive resistance’, in connection with it, so much so that even in English writing we often avoided it and used instead the word ‘satyagraha’ itself or some other equivalent English phrase.”

According to Gandhiji, there was scope for inclusion of violence in the methodology of passive resistance, no matter how remote. Secondly, passivity may also come to imply being weak, being unable to steadfastly and resolutely resist the might of the oppressor. Hence, it may connote a helpless or even escapist measure by the weak who are unable to fight the strong with the weapon of non violent resistance. satyagrah’s ethos was quite the opposite. It perceived nonviolence as a force greater than violence, and hence capable of fighting it effectively, and ultimately unarming it. Patient suffering was its driving force; one lets the oppressors use as much force and oppression as they can on the nonviolent protestors, until a stage came when they can incur no more violence or oppression. Their capacity to be violent would exhaust, but the capacity of
the protestors to endure it non-violently would not. Such valiant endurance and resistance, by no means, amounts to cowardice.

Another important distinction Gandhiji drew between passive resistance and satyagrah was that while the former did not insist on unequivocal adherence to truth under any and all circumstances, and at any and all cost, satyagrah did include truth as a faith induced, non-negotiable instrument in its ideological constitution. Gandhiji said conclusively on the matter, which is recorded in the Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, “Satyagrah is the weapon of the strong, it admits of no violence under any circumstances whatsoever, and it ever insists upon truth. I think I have made the distinction perfectly clear [between satyagrah and passive resistance].”

Satyagrah is unique in its conception as opposed to other resistance movements which strive to prove wrong or to defeat the opponent. On the other hand, if situation so demands, satyagrah even goes to the extent of cooperating with the opponents to meet the end objective. Its foundation is empathy and compassion. Gandhiji expressed this aspect eloquently in his writing in Harijan, dated March 25, 1939, “The satyagrahi’s object is to convert, not to coerce the wrongdoer”. Although satyagraha and passive resistance are still perceived as one and the same by certain quarters, the above deliberation dispels the misunderstanding.
Basic to his philosophy of social and moral change was the technique of *satyagraha* or resistance through absolutely truthful means. Apart from this, there were special movements to spread the message of *swadeshi*, to remove untouchability, to promote village reconstruction and special efforts to enable women to take their due place in society, to establish communal harmony, to implement a revolutionary scheme of education and to reform the Indian National Congress to serve as an instrument of social and political change.

Satyagraha was chosen as the starting point in the analysis because that was the quintessence of Gandhi’s ideology. To quote him, “It is a force, which, if it became universal, would revolutionize social ideals.” Here, it will be considered as the means Gandhi employed all his life to solve various problems and conflicts in society.

Specifically, *satyagraha* is a method of resolving disputes through moral pressure. It is a force that, according to Gandhi, could be used at all levels of human interaction – political, social and domestic. He believed that genuine social and economic equality could only be attained through the extensive use of this method and ordinary people could easily adopt it provided they had dedicated leaders.

In this context, he wrote, “True democracy or the *swaraj* of the masses can never come through untruthful and violent means for the
simple reason that the natural corollary to their use would be to remove all opposition through the suppression or extermination of the antagonists. That does not make for individual freedom. Individual freedom can have the fullest play only under a regime of unadulterated ahimsa.”

It would be worthwhile to briefly discuss the three localized satyagraha campaigns that Gandhi led between 1917 and 1918. The first of these, in Champaran district of Bihar in April 1917, was in response to an urgent demand from the peasants there for mediation in a case of extreme agrarian exploitation. As the details are well known, they need only a brief summing up here.

The European indigo planters forced the petty farmers of Champaran to grow indigo on the best portion of their land for a paltry consideration through a system called tin-kathiya. Where indigo cultivation had stopped because it ceased to be a commercial proposition for the planters, the peasants was made to pay heavy damages or compensation in the form of tawan or sharabheshi. Though there was great resentment among the farmers, they were helpless against the planters who had the support of the local government.

Soon after Gandhi arrived in Champaran, the district magistrate ordered him to leave the district immediately, but Gandhi disobeyed the order saying he was compelled by the higher law of his conscience. He
suffered a brief period of incarceration as a result. After his release, he carried out a vigorous and thorough investigation of the charges against the planters with the help of local pleaders and volunteers.

The peasants were solidly behind him as was proved by the thousands who came to give their statements in spite of threats from the planters. They were carefully instructed by Gandhi in the principles of satyagraha, especially regarding the value of non-violence and firm adherence to their demands. As Gandhi desired his enquiry to appear genuine, the planters and officials were allowed free access to the proceedings. He also kept the district authorities constantly informed of his activities. The upshot of his campaign was that the government was impelled to appoint a committee of enquiry in which Gandhi served as the peasants’ representative. All his charges were accepted and the tin-kathiya system was abolished.

There are several points to be noted in this whole exercise. The emphasis on fair means was obvious and firm, but it was the non-violent resistance to oppression that achieved the objective. Despite the mass mobilization in the area, there was no incidence of violence by the peasants, which naturally added to the credibility of the technique of satyagraha.
The self-confidence of the peasants was greatly enhanced for they realized that there was a plausible solution to their problems through a method that involved no violent confrontation with authority. For Gandhi, this was only the beginning as he saw in Champaran a reflection of the true condition of the peasantry in India. Their extreme poverty and backwardness motivated him to take steps towards improving their social conditions.

The greatest need, he perceived, was for all-round education, both for children and adults. He could now rely on an enthusiastic response and, with the help of local people in November 1917 he set up several schools, where the teachers were all volunteers with independent means, many of them from Mumbai and Gujarat. Gandhi also invited the help of the local authorities in the task, which he felt would benefit everyone. With regard to the main purpose of these schools, he wrote, “The chief thing aimed at is contact of the children with men and women of culture and unimpeachable moral character. That to me is education.”

There was also a programme of adult education aimed at women who lived in *purdah* and the chief content of this education was to teach the elementary rules of hygiene and the advantages of joint action for the promotion of community welfare, such as the making of proper village roads, the sinking of wells, and the construction and maintenance of village
latrines. Free medical aid was also given as far as was possible by some of the volunteers who were trained in the work. The secretary of the Servants of India Society, Dr M.S. Dev, an eminent surgeon and physician, came from Pune with three volunteers to help in the work. Gandhi left the work among the women to his wife, Kasturba.

Through his social activities in Champaran district, Gandhi was able to highlight two factors-important for those seeking social change through satyagraha. He showed that the trust of the local masses had to be gained by identifying with their problems and issues, and that material resources for voluntary work would not be lacking once the credibility of a cause was established.

However, the Gujarat (Kheda) Satyagraha was more important from the point of view of raising peasant consciousness and realization of the latent strength of the Indian peasantry. Gandhi stated the significance of the campaign in the following manner: “The movement is intended to assert the right of the people to be effectively heard in matters concerning themselves.” The Kheda campaign began in March 1918 and bore all the classic characteristics of Gandhi’s satyagraha technique.

The cause was the government’s refusal to grant a remission in revenue even though the peasants claimed their crops had failed. After carrying out a thorough examination, Gandhi found the peasants’ demand
to be just and wrote to the local authorities requesting suspension of revenue. When this request was not granted, he advised the peasants to simply refuse to pay the revenue and prepare stoically for the consequences.

There were several important features of this campaign. As satyagraha demanded total commitment to truthful means for pursuing a cause, Gandhi believed that the taking of a public pledge would greatly enhance the resolve of a people undertaking satyagraha. He, therefore, instituted the system of taking a pledge publicly and formulated the pledge on behalf of the peasants. It was a solemn declaration that they would not pay the government dues and would undergo all the suffering this might entail.

The pledge was taken by most peasants in all the villages of the district. Gandhi personally toured the villages, propagating his message of firm non-violent resistance and tried to keep up the morale of the peasants, who suffered silently as they saw their goods auctioned and cattle sold off. He posted circulars about the situation to the villages concerned and wrote extensively to the newspapers, explaining the issues involved.

A very important plank of the campaign was Gandhi’s direct appeal to the women in the villages. He urged them to fully support their men in the fight for justice and self-respect and bear with patience whatever loss was
incurred, As in Champaran, in Kheda too Gandhi was assisted by a band of committed volunteers who helped him sustain the tempo of the campaign. His written instructions to them illustrate the importance he attached to the values of non-violence, honesty and courtesy.

Finally on 3 June 1918, the government reluctantly granted relief to the peasants. The campaign ended, but Gandhi was led to remark, “The above orders have not been passed either with generosity or with the heart in them.” This fact apart, there is no doubt about the psychological impact of this struggle. The national press carried frequent reports of it and Gandhi and satyagraha became familiar topics of discussion throughout the country. It was recognized that even the poor and backward could, if they wanted, get justice from the rulers without force of any kind, provided they were prepared to suffer.

The satyagraha campaign that Gandhi undertook in February 1918 in Ahmedabad was also significant because it defined a new and harmonious relationship between capital and labour. The crux of the dispute between the textile industrialists and their workers was that while the workers demanded a 50 per cent wage increase, the mill owners were prepared to grant only 20 per cent.

Gandhi was asked to intervene by Ambalal Sarabhai, a mill owner and a friend of Gandhi. Arbitration proceedings had started, but the workers in
some factories struck work. In retaliation, the mill owners cancelled arbitration and gave the workers the option of accepting a 20 per cent increase or being discharged after being paid their due wages. The workers chose the latter and the mill owners declared a lockout on 22 February 1918.

On his own initiative, Gandhi undertook to lead the workers and get them their just demands. After a survey of the wage scales in Mumbai and Ahmedabad, Gandhi persuaded the workers to accept a 35 per cent increase in wages as a fair demand, but the mill owners refused to grant this.

Gandhi believed that if the workers could demonstrate that they were prepared to suffer all hardships and stick to their demand and not use violence or threats of any kind, they would win their case. He asked all of them to take a public pledge to this effect. Among others, Gandhi received wholehearted support from Ambalal’s sister, Anasuyaben, who was also a confidante of the workers.

Through public meetings, visits to workers’ homes and instructive leaflets, Gandhi and his co-workers tried to drive home to the striking workers the significance of their struggle – the fundamental role of workers in society, the question of their rights and self-respect, and the need to
remain non-violent and maintain themselves through other means, such as manual labour.

In spite of Gandhi’s efforts, the workers began to lose hope and some of them returned to work when the lockout was lifted on 13 March 1918. Gandhi realized that only through a drastic personal example would he be able to restrain the remaining workers from betraying their pledge. Therefore, he declared his resolve to fast from 15 March till either the workers got a 35 per cent increase in wages or they simply repudiated their pledge.

Apart from its immediate positive effect on the workers, the fast put great moral pressure on the mill owners, some of whom got ready to concede the workers’ demand. But Gandhi regarded this concession as unfortunate and asked them to be guided in their decision by their sense of justice, rather than concern for him. Gandhi’s suggestion of appointing an arbitrator was accepted by the mill owners and a settlement was arrived at on 18 March, whereby the workers were granted a 35 per cent increase in wages.

Three important principles were illustrated by the Ahmedabad satyagraha campaign. First, serious industrial disputes could be settled by peaceful arbitration, rather than militant protests. Second, the two classes of capitalists and workers were interdependent and could work in harmony.
Third, wealthy industrialists could behave as their workers’ ‘trustees’. Gandhi’s intervention in the Ahmedabad textile mill workers’ strike had a significant impact on labour relations in the Ahmedabad region.

In 1920, Gandhi organized the Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association, which became one of the most powerful labour unions in the country. It was based on the system of joint arbitration and conciliation. Its constitution provided for recourse to strikes only in case of failure of arbitration. The association contributed to a genuine improvement in the social conditions of the workers through comprehensive welfare measures. From 1937, the association also trained its members in a supplementary occupation to provide sustenance for rainy days, as, for example, during a lockout.

Gandhi’s experience of the three localized satyagraha campaigns discussed above was the prelude to similar campaigns led by him at the all India level. The efficacy and credibility of this instrument of change was established in both the agrarian and industrial spheres.

Later, it was to prove itself also in the political arena. Just as the three local campaigns left deep impressions in their areas of operation, the all India satyagraha campaigns between 1919 and 1942 led to extensive changes in India’s overall character. From being a thoroughly backward
and deeply divided society, there emerged in India widespread social and political consciousness, which penetrated the countryside on a major scale.

In 1920, Gandhiji was elected the president of the All India Home Rule League. With no freedom in sight, he urged a resolution for satyagraha campaign of non co-operation. Gandhiji decided upon an experiment of mass civil disobedience at Bardoli in 1922. He had to suspend the campaign owing to the outbreak of violence at Chauri Chaura. (The second campaign was extremely successful). Subsequently, he was arrested for seditious articles in `Young India'. Gandhiji was sentenced to six years in jail at the `great trial' in Ahmedabad under Judge Broomfield.

In 1929 he was arrested for burning foreign cloth under the non-co-operation movement. In December, the Congress session at Lahore voted for complete independence (Purna Swaraj). January 26 was proposed as Independence Day and Gandhiji launched the third all-India `satyagraha campaign'.

On March 12 1930, Gandhiji, 61, set off from Sabarmati with 79 satyagrahis on the historic Salt March to Dandi. Gandhiji and his followers covered 100 miles in 24 days to defy the `nefarious' Salt Act. Such publicized defiance required imagination and dignity. Technically, legally nothing had changed, except that British imperialism suffered a moral defeat. Gandhiji was arrested and sent to jail without trial.
By 1931 January, he was released unconditionally and by March he signed the historic Gandhi-Irwin pact, which also ended civil disobedience or non-co-operation on a mass scale. By August, he sailed for London to attend the second round table conference. After returning from England, Gandhiji renewed the satyagraha campaign, the fourth nation-wide effort.

In 1932, against widespread opposition, Gandhiji began his `fast onto death' protesting the British action of giving separate electorate to the untouchables. The fast ended after the British accepted the `Yerwada Pact'. By 1933, Gandhiji disbanded Satyagraha Ashram and converted it into a centre for removal of untouchability (the oppressed class). Then he toured India to help end untouchability. He also founded the All India Village Industries Association.

In 1940 Gandhiji protested against Britain's refusal to allow Indians to express their opinions regarding World War II by launching an individual satyagraha or civil disobedience campaign. 23,000 people were arrested in connection.

The year was 1942 and `Poorna Swaraj' (complete independence) was still not in sight. The Congress passed the `Quit India' resolution-the final nation-wide `Satyagraha campaign' with Gandhiji as the leader. Before the campaign was launched, all the Congress leaders including Gandhiji were arrested.
They were imprisoned at Aga Khan Palace where Gandhiji began his fast to end deadlock between viceroy and Indian leaders. On Feb 22, his wife Kasturba, 74, died in prison. By May, Gandhiji was released unconditionally from the prison owing to decline in health. This was his last imprisonment. Gandhiji had already spent 2,338 days in jail during his lifetime!

In 1946, at the age of 77, Gandhiji began his four-month tour of 49 villages in East Bengal to quell communal rioting over Muslim representation in provincial government. In the subsequent year, he also travelled in Bihar to lessen Hindu-Muslim tensions.

Although Gandhiji participated in talks with Lord Mountbatten and Jinnah, he opposed the division of the country in India and Pakistan. However, the country was partitioned and India granted independence. Riots broke out. Gandhiji prayed, fasted and travelled extensively to stop people from rioting.

After 1946, Gandhiji's efforts were devoted to Hindu-Muslim unity. Jinnah proclaimed August 16, 1946 as Direct Action Day. It was never clarified what it involved. But the Muslims responded to this call with vengeance. The great Calcutta killings followed. Gandhiji visited Noakhali and other areas to restore peace.
In 1948, Gandhiji undertook a fast for 5 days to bring communal peace in the country. On January 30, 1948, while holding a prayer meeting in Delhi, Gandhiji was shot dead by a Hindu fanatic Vinayak Nathuram Godse. He was totally opposed to Gandhiji’s efforts to bring about Hindu-Muslim amity. Thus ended the eventful life of the greatest apostle of peace that the world had ever seen.