Gandhi was not a career politician. He did not enter public life to gain political power. However, he wielded so much influence over his compatriots, followers and associates in the struggle for freedom that he became a centre of political power in Indian politics for a long time. He was prepared to opt in and out of political arena. Such an unconventional political ambition and lack of commitment to constant political involvement implied a challenge to some of the basic assumptions about the nature, role and use of political power. His political career added a new dimension to the concept of political power.

His main efforts were to separate violence from political power. He was not ready to admit that some conflicts do not yield to compromise and can be resolved only through violence. He empirically proved that violence is not an essential ingredient of political power. It is more effective and more lasting when it acquires the character of moral power. Thus, there is a paradoxical twist in his method of wielding political power. It can be an effective substitute of violence.
As already stated, political power causes a change in the behaviour of another actor. In conventional politics, only change in the behaviour is required irrespective of the means adopted. But Gandhi was deeply concerned about the means in bringing about a change in the behaviour of his opponent or those who did not agree with him. Though the element of compulsion is not ruled out in Satyagraha, as it has already been admitted, it is certainly different from that which is accompanied by violence. It is moral compulsion which is fundamentally different from the compulsions of the conventional power. It cannot be said that violence is very essential element in traditional power, but it has a significant role to play there. However, the power that is exercised through violence can cause physical or mental injury as a result of which the personality of the person over whom it is exercised, is distorted. But the power that is exercised without any violence or threat of it aims

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2. Chapter 5, pp.182-196.
at changing the behaviour of the person with no or minimum loss of his personality, for the changed behaviour becomes a part of his own character. Gandhi tried to mould the conduct of the people or of his followers by setting his own example. His demands were first not addressed to others but to himself. They followed him because his life style appeared more satisfactory to them either for raising them spiritually or materially.

The power which Gandhi generated was not by inflicting sufferings upon others but by inflicting sufferings upon himself. Here the source of political power is self-suffering and service. A satyagrahi himself suffers all the inconveniences and does not cause any harm to the opponent. The injured member has so much regard for the opponent that he suffers for the sake of his principles without retaliating and without anger against those who differ from him. In all non-essential matters, he readily agrees with his opponent. The action of satyagrahi whether he resists or resign, is calculated to promote the common welfare which includes the welfare of the opponent. The motive underlying his resistance to the opponent is not to destroy him but to bring him round to a solution which is satisfactory to
both the parties involved in a conflict. Undoubtedly
his resistance is a source of embarrassment to the
opponent as long as the latter fails to realize the
inequity in his actions. The element of compulsion
diminishes as soon as he realizes his own mistakes and
yield to a synthesis which results from the non-
violent resistance.

Self-sacrifice is the main source of satyagrahi's
power. It is the ultimate price that he has to pay for
making others appreciate his point of view and yield to
it with a view to creating a just order. It is a joint
effort of the satyagrahi as well as of his opponent. That
way Gandhi looked upon non-violence as a great source of
power. As already noted, non-violence to Gandhi was not
merely confined to refraining from causing physical
injury. Imposition of his own view by any method was a
form of violence, which he tried to avoid in his relations
with others, in the decision-making processes of the
Congress as well as other organizations with which he was
associated. He had great capacity to listen to others
and win them over to his point of view through incessant
discussions and arguments. Quite often, he modified his
own stand through his own characteristic way, if he
discovered the truth in the point of view of those who
differed with him. For instance, he could go a long way in meeting the point of view of the socialists in the Congress or earlier the Swarajists in the Congress. In this way, he not only maintained the unity in the Congress but kept them around him and influenced their minds in due course of time. As a result, he emerged a father figure and in that capacity exercised enormous power in the political process.

Similarly, Gandhi exercised tremendous power over the masses in India. This again was the result of his efforts to identifying himself with the good of the poverty-stricken and suffering humanity around him. His effort was to become one with them and then to raise them to a higher level. In other words, Gandhi exercised moral power. It is more akin to the power exercised by parents over their children. Even if it has some coercive element, it is permissible as long as it does not do harm to the personality of those over whom it is exercised. We have observed that Gandhi was aware of the importance of political power in enabling the people to better their conditions in society. But he was equally aware that coercive power vested in any institution or person by law can cause harm to the individuals in society. He never forgot that power
corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. He, therefore, advocated diffusion of power in order to neutralize its coercive element. Decentralization both political and economic and the participation of the people in the decision-making processes, are the devices suggested for reducing the element of coercion in any system. Unbridled power is a danger to the society. So it has to be harnessed to the good of the individuals in society.

Though power has a tendency to corrupt its holder but it all depends upon the holder to allow himself to be corrupted by it or not. Gandhi himself exercised immense political power during his life time, but not even a single critic of him could level any charge that he used that power for his personal benefit.

As noted earlier, the Indian National Congress of those days was largely his creation. But he never hankered after any post in it. He became its president only once and never accepted this office again even when it was offered to him. Had he wished to become the Prime Minister or the President of the country after her independence in 1947, it would have been a cakewalk for

\(^3\text{Chapter 2, pp. 86-115.}\)
him. His was the most legitimate claim. There was nothing unusual in making such a claim. For architects of all great nations accepted the highest office soon after they were victorious. This was very true of those leaders who led a successful revolution and established powerful regimes in their countries. But Gandhi was unique amongst all builders of nations. He never thought of accepting any office anywhere.