The issue of political power has acquired great importance in recent times both in the realm of theory and practice. Several political theorists lay an unprecedented emphasis on the universal impulse to power. For them power remains the central axis about which the social commonweal spins. It is now common place to define politics as "a struggle for power".\(^1\) It is also abundantly clear from the spate of literature on the subject produced by well known social scientists like Harold Lasswell, Charles Merriam, Bertrand Russel, Max Weber, Robert Dahl etc. Reviewing their theories of power, George Catlin categorically stated that 'Politics is the Science of Power'.\(^2\)

Gandhi dominated the Indian Politics from 1920 till his death in 1948, and is widely acknowledged as a great political leader and thinker. Several erudite and penetrating volumes have been written about his life, political style and thought. However, hardly anyone has taken up seriously and comprehensively his

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approach to political power. The present study is a modest attempt in this direction.

Here the focus is on how Gandhi viewed political power; what is its role in society; can it be used non-violently; can the element of coercion be removed from it in accordance with Gandhi's view of non-violent moral power; what was its nature when Gandhi gained political power? Did he succeed in eliminating coercive element in his exercise of power? Generally it is assumed that political power flows from top to bottom but Gandhi tried to put the whole process in the reverse gear and generated power from below. To what extent he had been successful in his attempt? It is a matter of great interest to any student of political behaviour that while Gandhi was suspicious of the possible abuses of political power and advocated complete decentralisation of it, he himself exercised immense political power. Was it in accord with his suspicion of power? Was there any dichotomy between his theory and practice? All these and various other related questions have not yet been answered satisfactorily.

Some of these questions cannot be answered unless we study how Gandhi rose to power after his return from South Africa in 1915 and how he wielded it after having
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(JAI NARAIN)