Gandhi was not against political power. The focus of his criticism was the conventional power politics and its basic assumptions. His efforts were to separate violence and other similar evils from power. A close scrutiny of the doctrine of violence invariably shows that by inflicting sufferings on the opponent the efforts are made to break the opponent's will and to make him surrender, and with him all opposition. Suffering thus becomes a source of power politics which compels and coerces. However, there is a paradoxical twist in the Satyagrahic method of generating political power through sufferings and service. In Satyagraha, it is by inviting sufferings from the opponent and not after inflicting sufferings upon him that the resultant power is produced. The basic formula is the same, but its application is about face. It almost amounts to putting the energy in reverse gear. Satyagraha can be adopted by any people and can be an effective substitute for violent methods. This novel method of generating political power from sufferings produced the desired result during freedom struggle under the leadership of Gandhi.
The word Satyagraha is Sanskrit in origin. It is a compound word formed of Satya and Agraha. Satya means 'truth', Agraha means 'holding fast', 'adherence', 'insistence'. Thus the compound word denotes clinging to truth, holding fast to truth, insistence on truth. It means, therefore, truth-force. Truth, according to Gandhi, is soul or spirit. It is, therefore, known as soul-force.

The history of the word 'Satyagraha' is interesting. In 1906, Gandhi organised the Indians in South Africa and led a new kind of resistance movement against the unjust laws under which they were then suffering. This movement was first known as passive resistance. But as the struggle continued he became aware that some new principle had come into being. He felt the need of an adequate word to describe this new kind of resistance. He offered a small prize in his newspaper "Indian Opinion". Out of many entries he choose the suggestion of Shri Magan Lal Gandhi: 'Sadagraha', meaning firmness in a good cause. "I liked the word", wrote Gandhi, 'but it did not fully represent the whole idea I wished it to connote. I therefore corrected it to 'Satyagraha'. 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 non-violence, and gave up the use of phrase "passive resistance".¹

The political experience in satyagraha that he conducted in South Africa and later on in India constituted a total challenge to the conventional power politics and its basic assumptions. If his techniques repudiated anything very clearly, it was the need for a conventional power criterion in the political struggle. The traditional patterns of political behaviour are altered in his politics. His technique of satyagraha, since the beginning of its evolution in South Africa during 1906–1914, has had valuable evidence on this matter. When Gandhi found that General Smuts did not implement the agreement in 1913, he planned a protest march of the satyagrahis from Durban on January 1, 1914. The plan was in preparation, and all efforts were being made to make it a success. In the meanwhile, Gandhi went to Pretoria with C.F. Andrews. But there he learnt of a great strike of the European employees of the Union railways which made the position of the government extremely delicate. Gandhi was faced with a potential dilemma. It was open for him to bargain with his opponent, when he

was in difficulty by exploiting his weakness as is usually done in the conventional power politics. Here was an excellent opportunity waiting for him. In fact Gandhi admitted that some of his colleagues urged him to take advantage of the situation and strike the iron as it was very hot. But he was guided by the ethics of his non-violent technique alone which required that he should not press his demands at a time when the government was confronting a genuine difficulty. He resisted all types of pressures from his colleagues and decided to postpone the contemplated march. Gandhi wrote about this decision, "But I declared that Indians could not thus assist the railway strikers, as they were not out to harass the Government, their struggle being entirely different and differently conceived. Even if we undertook the march, we would begin it at some other time when the railway trouble had ended."²

This is the difference between his techniques based on truth and non-violence, and the other techniques based on the power politics. The working of the non-violent technique is not affected by the consideration of power. This decision was greatly appreciated by the Britishers. This gesture of cordiality amidst an acute conflict evoked a natural response from the adversaries. "This

²Ibid., p.295.
decision of ours, "Gandhi added, 'created a deep impression, and was cabled to England by Reuters. Lord Ampthill cabled his congratulations from England. English friends in South Africa too, appreciated our decision. One of the Secretaries of General Smuts jocularly said: 'I do not like your people, and do not care to assist them at all. But what am I to do? You help us in our days of need. How can we lay hands upon you? I often wish you took to violence like the English strikers, then we would know at once how to dispose of you. But you will not injure even the enemy. You desire victory by self-suffering alone and never transgress your self-imposed limits of courtesy and chivalry. And that is what reduces us to sheer helplessness." Here is a testimony from the enemy about the impact of the non-violent technique. The adversary was not humbled or outwitted but was enabled to take the right course. This was because Gandhi always sought a genuine reconciliation and settlement, and not a one-sided victory. Even when the 'Smuts-Gandhi agreement' embodying the substantial acceptance of the demands of the Indian settlers in South Africa was signed on January 30, 1914, Gandhi was urged by his associates to press for more demands.

3Ibid.
But he declined this plea as it would be contrary to the spirit of Satyagraha. Referring to this question Gandhi wrote in the Indian Opinion of February 11, 1914: "It needs to be understood, once and for all, that the path of truth is not meant for ends not consistent with truth. It is our belief that raising our demands will amount to untruthfulness." And this rare spirit is usually uncommon to the power politics.

During the Ahmedabad Mill strike in 1917 when certain workers suggested to increase the demands beyond 35 per cent hike in allowances, he refused to do so by saying, "I say you can demand even a 100 per cent increase. But it would be unjust if you do so. Be content, in the present circumstances, with what you have demanded. If you ask for more, it will pain me. We can not demand any thing unreasonable from anybody." He reminded the workers of their own shortcomings. When he noticed signs of their weakening in the face of hardships, he undertook an indefinite fast to demonstrate his readiness to die for their cause. Later on, when the employers yielded, he refused to take full advantage of the situation and press for a complete acceptance of the workers' demands. His stand possibly antagonised a section of workers for a

---

4. The CMIE, Volume XII, p.350.
5. Ibid., Volume XIV, p.217.
while, but he pacified them. The conclusion of the
struggle embodied the true spirit of satyagraha—where
no advantage was taken from the difficulties of the
opponent.

The Gandhian technique in the Indian national
movement developed these characteristics to a great
extent. The method of non-violent resistance was easily
conspicuous among them. It grew out of the historic
challenge of the Indian nationalism. At the time of
Gandhi's advent in the Indian politics, the Indian National
Congress represented two major attitudes on the question
of fighting the foreign government. They were divided
between the extremist view and the liberal wings of the
Congress. The extremist view was completely opposed to
the British power which it sought to replace by the
nationalist power. The liberal or moderate view was
equally opposed to the power of foreign government, but it
was conditioned to share this power gradually in the
process of transition from foreign rule to the self-government.
Both the extremists and the liberal nationalists were
agreed on the objective of national power, though their
methods of obtaining it varied. But it was the non-violent
technique of Gandhi alone that made a real difference of two
sections of the Indian National Congress by projecting an
alternative to the power of that kind. Non-violent resistance
to the British government emerged as a valid alternative to the previous methods of national agitation that were based upon the customary sanctions of violence and power.

The Gandhian technique, as it was operated by the Indian National Congress, was marked by a positive rejection of power. When the Congress demonstrated its faith in the non-violent movement by implementing its programme with unprecedented enthusiasm in 1919-21, the whole nation seemed to vindicate Gandhi's leadership. Romain Rolland wrote in his biography of Gandhi, "In 1921 Gandhi's power was at its apogee. His authority as a moral leader was vast, and without having sought it, almost unlimited political authority has been placed in his hands." The non-violent non-cooperation movement was thoroughly shaken by the tragedy of Chauri Chaura on February 1922, when mob violence claimed many casualties. Gandhi was again on the horns of a dilemma. If Gandhi was keen on attaining power, he could have continued the movement despite the happenings in Chauri Chaura. In view of the mounting popular participation, he might not have been deterred by usual norms, from the course he took, as an unquestioned leader of his people. But he immediately suspended the non-cooperation movement after Chauri Chaura incident, and made a public confession of his mistake.

Writing in Young India of February 16, 1922, he explained his unexpected move thus: "Suspension of mass civil disobedience and subsidence of excitement are necessary for further progress, indeed indispensable to prevent further retrogression. I hope, therefore, that by suspension every Congressman or woman will not feel disappointed but he or she will feel relieved of the burden of unreality and of national sin."[7]

The entire body of workers in Bardoli, young and old, who were getting ready for mass civil disobedience, told Gandhi that if he retreated after throwing out a challenge to the Government, the whole country would be disgraced before the world.[8] Jawahar Lal Nehru mentioned his reaction to this decision of Gandhi in his Autobiography in the following words: "Suddenly... we in prison learnt, to our amazement and consternation, that Gandhiji... had suspended civil resistance ... we were angry when we learnt of this stoppage of our struggle at a time when we seemed to be consolidating our position and advancing on all fronts."[9] What Nehru voiced on this matter was also the common criticism amongst the national leadership of the Congress of this aspect of Gandhi's politics. But Gandhi

---

stood firm, however, in the midst of the storm and refused to lead a movement 'half violent and half non-violent, even though it might result in the attainment of so called Swaraj', for it would not be real Swaraj as he had conceived it. The withdrawal of a political movement when it was deviating from the main principle was basic to Gandhi's notion of politics without conventional notion of power. It was not an aimless measure, but an implicit ethic, involved in his techniques. The non-violent movement was also withdrawn several times in 1932-1934.

But the premature suspension of a movement is also viewed by some as a political strategy. If the suspension of civil disobedience movement 1932-34 is analysed, some possible explanations can emerge. In the first place, it was not possible to keep these struggles going effectively for more than a year with almost all the leaders in prison. Then, no great empire with its power in tact, is likely to yield to a rebellion, violent or non-violent, while it is still going on. The 'conversion' Gandhi expected might happen gradually, in favourable circumstances. Even then, there must be a pause, an interval for reconsideration and this suspension period can be this much needed interval. Gandhi might not have

---

10 *The GSN*, Volume XXII, p.351.
planned this but in fact the series of movements, he led wave after wave with intervals for recovery in India and reflection in England, was the best strategy he could have followed. It is very useful politically to suspend a movement when the circumstances are not favourable and things have gone out of control and then again relaunch that during the favourable time.

Gene Sharp has listed three possible broad processes or mechanisms, by which the satyagrahis can influence the behaviour of their opponents. These are conversion, accomodation and non-violent coercion.\textsuperscript{11} Conversion means that there is a genuine change of heart of the opponent and he comes around to the point of view of the satyagrahi. Gandhi’s own statements provide good illustrations of this objective of conversion. In a letter to the Viceroy, Lord Irwin in 1930 he wrote, “For my ambition is no less than to convert the British people through non-violence, and thus make them see the wrong they have done to India. I do not seek to harm your people. I want to serve them even as I want to serve my own people.”\textsuperscript{12} On another occasion he wrote that it is not the intention of a satyagrahi to embarrass the wrong doer. \textsuperscript{11}The appeal


\textsuperscript{12}The CWGC, Volume XLIII, p.6.
is never to his fear; it is, must be always to his heart. The satyagrahi's object is to convert, not to coerce the wrong doer. In line with this attitude the satyagrahis are supposed to emphasize that they intend no personal hostility towards the members of the opponent group. He added that he wished by non-cooperation to induce the opponent to cease inflicting the evil or harm so that cooperation could be possible on a different basis. This aim of conversion in certain situations had significant effects on the opponents group. Replacement of hostile personal attitudes by positive attitudes can reduce the pressure on the opponent group to be defensively aggressive.

Practically the complete conversion of the opponent is very rare. Also the conversion of the opponents may contribute to change by accommodation or by non-violent coercion.

Accommodation as a mechanism of satyagraha falls in middle position between conversion and non-violent coercion. In accommodation the opponent is neither converted nor non-violently coerced but resolves to grant the demands of the satyagrahi. He considers some other factors more important than the issues at the stake in the conflict, and the opponent is, therefore, willing to yield on the issue rather than to risk or to experience some other

\[13\text{Harlow, 25.3.1939, p.64.}\]
condition or result regarded as still more unsatisfactory. But there may be opponents who are not willing to concede the demands of satyagrahis. Even if they know that they may be finally defeated but prefer to remain firm to the end, satyagrahis may resort to non-violent coercion.

In non-violent coercion the opponent has not changed his mind on the issues and wants to continue the struggle, but is unable to do so, as the source of his power and means of control have been taken away from him without the use of violence. The concept of coercion is not limited to the effects of threats or use of physical violence. On the contrary, coercion is defined as "the threat or the application of force, physical or non-physical, in order to persuade some person or group to take some decision or perform some action which otherwise they would not be likely to do." It is often made clear that coercion can be effected by non-physical pressure including moral compulsion. The will of the opponent is blocked despite his continued efforts to impose it. Thus the opponent is coerced though non-violently. Jawahar Lal Nehru also believes that non-violence coerces as well as violence.

---

The crucial point involved here is the question of whether satyagraha is a coercive force. Gandhi himself had time and again refused to see any element of coercion in it and advocated it to be a method of conversion. In the light of events in India as well as in the light of some of Gandhi's own activities, however, it becomes apparent that satyagraha does contain an aspect of non-violent coercion, if in a somewhat modified form. The self-purifying phase of satyagraha does not allow non-violent coercion to be a part of the compulsion of non-violent action. It is


misleading, therefore, to describe satyagraha as a form of non-violent coercion. But it is equally misleading, on the other hand, to call satyagraha a pure and simple process of conversion as Gandhi and some of his followers would have it. Krishnalal Shridharni rightly puts it "as a process of conversion in a special sense of the term; special because there is always present in it what for the lack of a better name we will call the compelling element." To be more fair, it can be then called moral compulsion.

A critical analysis of the working of any method of satyagraha can make the issue clear.

The methods of satyagraha can be broadly classified into four categories: purificatory devices; forms of non-cooperation; methods of civil-disobedience, and Constructive Programmes. The division is mainly for conceptual clarity and convenience of presentation. There is an inevitable overlap in practice as well as in theory between these four categories. In the first category of purificatory devices; pledges, prayers and fasts can be included while in the second category of non-cooperation techniques, hartal, boycott, hijrat and fasting up to death can be listed. Picketing, marches, non-payment of taxes and deliberate defiance of a specific law comes under the third category. The fifteen

points constructive programme offered by Gandhi is illustrative of the constructive side of satyagraha.

Leaving aside the constructive programme, fasting is the mildest tool of satyagraha. This creates the minimum inconvenience to the opponent. But not to speak of other techniques, fasting can also compel the opponent. A detailed analysis of some fasts undertaken by Gandhi corroborate this line of argument.

Gandhi undertook a great many fasts in his life. But in the present study only three of his famous fasts will be undertaken; the fast against the communal award in 1932, the Rajkot fast in 1939 and the 'Epic Fast' of 1943 against the policy of the British government.

The British Government had announced the communal award of 1932. Under this scheme the depressed classes were recognised as a minority community entitled to the separate electorate. Gandhi strongly opposed the demand for the separate representation of the untouchables and declared his determination to fast unto death from September 20, 1932, unless the communal award was meanwhile revoked. But the British Government took the stand that the separate electorates were demanded by the depressed classes themselves and the decision of the British Government could not be altered unless the minority communities concerned agreed to do so.

In a meeting on September 19, 1932, the Hindu leaders including Pt. Madan Mohan Malaviya, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, M.R. Jayakar,
C. Rajagopalachari etc., tried to persuade Dr. B.R. Ambedkar to withdraw the demand for separate electorates, but he refused to do so without knowing Gandhi's terms. On September 20, 1932, Gandhi started his fast. Informal negotiations started between Dr. Ambedkar and the Hindu leaders. When Dr. Ambedkar refused to give in, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru suggested a scheme of primary and secondary election for a limited number of seats which, while maintaining the principle of joint electorate, would enable the depressed classes to choose their own candidates. Dr. Ambedkar accepted this proposal. Then came the question of period after which the system of primary and secondary elections would come to an end. Dr. Ambedkar suggested a referendum at the end of 15 years but the other leaders rejected it. Meanwhile Gandhi's condition had been deteriorating rapidly. After some discussion over this issue, Gandhi suggested a period of five years for referendum but Ambedkar did not agree. Gandhi's condition deteriorated further; Ambedkar offered to reduce the period in question to ten years. But Gandhi replied, "Your logic is irrefutable. But let the referendum be at the end of five years. Surely, five years is a sufficient period to prove the bonafides of the Caste Hindus. But if you insist on postponing the referendum further, I would begin to suspect that what you want is not to test the bonafides of the Caste Hindus, but
time only to organise the Depressed Classes for an adverse referendum.\textsuperscript{20} Ambedkar however remained adamant on the ten years period, until Gandhi terminated the interview by saying, "There you are. Five years or my life."\textsuperscript{21} Gandhi's condition had now become quite critical. On the same evening after the interview, Ambedkar had a prolonged discussion with his associates, at the end of which he declared that he was unable to change his position regarding the ten years period. Nocturnal discussions with the caste Hindu leaders followed, until finally Ambedkar responded to the appeal of the latter in the small hours of the morning, to postpone the question of the period concerned until a future date when it would be decided by a mutual agreement. Gandhi expressed his satisfaction over this. Thus on September 25, a Conference of the leaders took place at Poona, where Poona Pact was signed. Gandhi informed the British Government telegraphically that he would break the fast if the latter would accept the Poona Pact in full. The British Government did so promptly, and on the evening of September 26, Gandhi broke his fast.

Undoubtedly, Gandhi had caused the necessary change in the behaviour of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar or in other words Gandhi had exercised his power over him. But in

\textsuperscript{21}\textit{Ibid.}
order to prove that this exercise of power was completely free from coercion, it would be necessary to show that Ambedkar underwent a genuine change of heart. When Gandhi declared his intention to fast unto death, Ambedkar issued a statement in which he totally rejected Gandhi's case against the communal award stating, "I however trust the Mahatma will not drive me to the necessity of making a choice between his life and the rights of my people." The facts of the case briefly narrated above indicate that Ambedkar was most reluctant to change his position throughout the negotiations, that Gandhi very definitely placed before Ambedkar the clear alternatives of accepting his terms or the responsibility for his death and the former made each concession most reluctantly with the progressive deterioration of Gandhi's condition. Long afterwards, Ambedkar still maintained that he had signed the Poona Pact against his best judgement. In his own words, "I had to make a choice between two different alternatives. There was before me the problem of saving for the Untouchables the political rights which the Prime Minister had given them. I responded to the call of humanity and saved the life of

Mr. Gandhi by agreeing to alter the Communal Award in a manner satisfactory to Mr. Gandhi. Thus if Ambedkar's own statement about his reaction to Gandhi's fast is correct and analysed carefully then it follows that he remained convinced about the correctness of his original stand, and yielded against his wishes and was merely compelled by Gandhi to change his original stand. It was a pact signed under moral compulsion.

Several other explanations can also be given which influenced Dr. Ambedkar's decision of signing the pact. It was almost sure that if Ambedkar had not altered his stand, Gandhi would have died. The death of Gandhi could completely eclipse the political career of Ambedkar since he would have been held responsible for the death of the Mahatma who was very much popular among the depressed classes also. Ambedkar had clearly anticipated the reaction of the death of Gandhi and so in order to save his own skin, he signed the pact.

The Rajkot fast, too, is not free from the element of coercion: A satyagraha struggle had been going for some months between the people and the ruler of Rajkot, a state on the western coast of India near Bombay. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was leading the people. In the

23 Ibid., p.88.
course of the struggle an agreement was arrived at between the ruler and Sardar Patel. But the ruler repudiated the agreement almost immediately afterwards. At this stage Gandhi intervened and pleaded with the ruler and his advisers to honour the agreement. The efforts failed. Thereupon, Gandhi decided to resort to fast on March 3, 1939, in order to arouse the ruler's conscience. Several friends and colleagues pleaded with him to have mercy upon himself and give up the fast but with no result. The following morning Gandhi dictated a letter to E.C. Gibson, the Resident, requesting him to transmit a message to the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, calling for "the immediate intervention of the Paramount Power so as to induce fulfilment of the promise made by the Thakore Sahab." This appeal to the Viceroy succeeded. Lord Linlithgow intervened, with the result that the matter was referred to the arbitration of Chief Justice of India, Sir Maurice Gwyer. To Gandhi this seemed to "provide a basis for breaking the fast," which he actually did at 2 P.M. on March 7, after assuring himself of the Thakore Sahab's "immediate order for the release of prisoners." Sir Maurice Gwyer gave the award in favour of the satyagrahis. The ruler had no alternative left but to yield.

One would expect that, a direct satyagraha method having been chosen, it would have been carried to its logical sequence. The ruler would have yielded, or come to some other agreement, or allowed Gandhi to die. But this was not done. Rather the help of Viceroy was sought. It consisted in seeking the help of the Viceroy, as a sort of additional weapon in aid of the weapon of fast. Later on Gandhi himself realized his mistake. In a statement to the press, he said, "My fast to be pure should have been addressed only to the Thakore Sahab and I should have been content to die if I could not have melted his heart or rather that of his adviser, Durbar Shri Virawala."\(^{27}\) The ruler yielded not because of the fast. If Thakore Sahab had decided to flout the award, the Paramount Power would have, assuming that it would have acted honestly, compelled him to abide by it, if necessary by the use of force. It was thus a victory of the Viceroy and not of the fast. Gandhi admitted that "this was not the way of ahimsa or conversion. It was the way of himsa or coercion."\(^{28}\) If it was open to Gandhi to try the constitutional method of appealing to Viceroy for the redress of grievances, it might well be questioned whether it was proper to resort to direct action at all.

\(^{27}\text{Ibid.}, \text{P.270.}\)

\(^{28}\text{Ibid.}\)
until all other methods had been exhausted. If on the other hand, there was a perfect case for direct action, why did he seek the Viceroy's intervention? Thus on both grounds his position was inconsistent with the principle of satyagraha. But as soon as this became clear to Gandhi, he at once repented publically and as a practical proof of repentance renounced the fruit of his victory.29 He had realised that it was his moral weakness that had prompted him to appeal to the Paramount Power and seek adventitious aid unbecoming of a true satyagrahi. He apologised to the Viceroy and Sir Maurice Guyer for having in his weakness thrust on them a needless burden.

Gandhi undertook another fast for 21 days on February 9, 1943, against the policies of the British Government towards himself and the Indian National Congress, in Aga Khan Palace in Poona where he was detained. Again some fundamental questions regarding fasting as a technique to coerce the opponent to change his behaviour were raised by both the sides, which more or less represent the two opposite viewpoints. In a letter to the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, dated December 31, 1942, Gandhi declared that he would start a fast after 6 months of detention (that is, in February 1943) if the attitude of the government towards

29Ibid., p.273.
himself and the Congress did not change, because as a satyagrahi he had no other remedy left but to "crucify the flesh by fasting." He still did not want to do it if it could be avoided. In another letter to the Viceroy, Gandhi communicated in the following words, "If then I can not get soothing balm for my pain, I must resort to the law prescribed for the satyagrahis, namely, a fast according to capacity... For my wish is not to fast unto death, but to survive the ordeal, if God so wills. This fast can be ended sooner by the Government giving the needed relief."31

On the other hand, the Viceroy wrote to Gandhi, "I would welcome a decision on your part to think better of it, not only because of my own natural reluctance to see you wilfully risk your life, but because I regard the use of a fast for political purposes as a form of political blackmail (himes) for which there can be no moral justification, and understood from your own previous writings that this was also your view."32 Similarly on February 15, 1943, Sir Reginald Maxwell, the Home Minister, speaking on an adjustment motion on the fast in the Central Legislative Assembly observed: "I must confess that speaking for myself it is certainly repugnant to the Western ideas

30 Ibid., Volume LXXVII, p.51.
31 Ibid., p.56.
of decency to exploit against an opponent his feelings of humanity, chivalry or mercy, or to trifle with such a sacred trust as one’s own life in order to play on the feelings of the public for the sake of some purely mundane object.”

Even if one does not agree with the official attitude of the British Government, there is no denying the fact that fasting as a technique to pressurise the opponent contain coercion in it in one form or the other. Fasting can be practised only in a liberal socio-political set up. It can be practised only against a sympathetic adversary. In case of communal award fast, one is tempted to speculate that had the adversary been M.A. Jinnah instead of Dr. Ambedkar, who was uncompromisingly critical of the Gandhian method and rather adamant in his views, and against whom significantly Gandhi never resorted to a fast although he had more conflicts with this individual in his life than with any other person, the result of the fast might have been quite different. It is again highly doubtful whether this form of satyagraha can be practised in a political system where opponents of the Government can disappear at midnight never to be heard of again. It may not always lead to the opponent

yielding ground. Even when the opponent makes necessary concessions, there is no certainty that he has done so out of conviction or of a change of heart. There is also the danger of fanatical or otherwise irresponsible persons motivated by political expediency or religious orthodoxy, using the technique of fasting for serving vested interests or even personal ends.

The resort to fasting may be very inconvenient and irritating to the person or authority against whom it is used, particularly if the person fasting is more popular than the person or authority against whom the fast is directed, and his cause logically answerable and sympathetically looked upon by those whose goodwill the person in authority cannot altogether ignore. He may find himself in the horns of dilemma, if, on the one hand, he does not wish to grant the fasting man's demand, and on the other, does not want to take the odium of allowing him to die. He does not wish to be in the wrong box in the eyes of the world and does not know how to avoid it, without being obliged to do right. But if the invitation of suffering upon oneself is himsa or blackmail, as Lord Linlithgow termed it, then decidedly every form of satyagraha is coercive and every demand accompanied by a threat to resort to self-suffering is blackmail. For there is no satyagraha except for gaining some point, with preparedness
to suffer for it until it is gained. Being a moral substitute for violent methods of achieving the same purpose, what is being sought in violence by inflicting suffering on the opponent is sought in satyagraha by inviting suffering on oneself. And blackmail or coercion is never expected to invite self-suffering or to be done with a feeling to do or be good to the opponent. What is more the exact term for the effect of satyagraha on the opponent is not non-violent coercion. The term 'moral compulsion' or 'moral pressure' can demonstrate this effect rather more specifically. Gandhi himself preferred this form. Referring to his Rajkot fast he said, "If my fast which I hope will be avoided, is to be interpreted as pressure, I can only say that such moral pressure should be welcomed by all concerned."[35]

So this much pressure is always there when an attempt is made to exercise power over other. Hence when Gandhi talked of 'complete coercion free power' and when actually he exercised power, there seem to be an element of non-violent moral pressure in his exercise of it. On this basis it will be wrong to conclude that there is some difference between his theory and practice. As stated earlier, what actually is, there are two Gandhis—

---

Gandhi the idealist and Gandhi the realist statesman.
In his idealism Gandhi dreamt of a complete pressure
free political power, where there is no coercion
violent or non-violent. But actually when he himself
exercised power, there was definitely some pressure
over others. But this is the contradiction between the
abstract and the concrete, the ideal and the real and
not between his theory and practice.

Gandhi was very well aware of this coercive
element of political power and that is why he suggested
complete diffusion of it. He was of the opinion that
when power is concentrated at one place or around one
person or group of persons it may lead to violence but
when it is diffused, power loses its teeth and the element
of coercion in it is neutralised. Repeatedly, he argued
that no man however highly placed be may be should have
absolute powers in his hands. But it is alleged in
certain quarters that although Gandhi advocated complete
diffusion of power and bitterly criticised its
concentration. Yet he himself exercised immense political
power. Rather he had become a source of power himself.
On one hand, he tirelessly advocated for the decentrali-
sation of power but on the other hand, the concentration
of immense political power around him, hints at the
existence of some gap between his theory and practice about
the nature and role of political power. Let us examine this controversy in its true perspective and see whether actually there is some gap or not.

As already discussed right from the Nagpur session of Indian National Congress in 1920 till his death, Gandhi remained the main arbitrator and policy maker of the Congress party. The way in which he suspended the non-cooperation movement in 1922 after the tragedy of Chauri Chaura, the suspension of civil disobedience movement several times in 1932-34 and the handling of Quit India Movement in 1942 speak volumes of the political power Gandhi exercised. But his opponents have argued that he tolerated the views of others so long as his own power in the Congress was not touched. They say that when Subhas Chandra Bose successfully contested for the second term in 1939, despite the opposition of Gandhi, he showed great intolerance and consequently, Subhas Chandra Bose had to resign. Gandhi, who always went on advocating the decentralization of power but when someone challenged his own power, he became restless and managed to oust the legally elected president. This gives ample proof of a wide gap between his theory and practice. Tolerance of the view of the opponent is very essential for the decentralization.
Further, his subsequent differences with the Congress working Committee in the early forties and the stiff attitude he showed towards the then Congress President Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, showed that Gandhi always acted on his own and whenever there was a difference of opinion, the opponent either had to bow or had to go. But when the power is decentralized equal weight should be given to the views of others and sometime one has to accept the views of others even if this is contrary to his own viewpoint. Consequently, it is argued that Gandhi had no real love for the decentralization of power when his own power was challenged. But if all these events are studied in their true perspective a more satisfactory conclusion can emerge.

As for his relation with the Indian National Congress is concerned, he was a father figure to the most of Congress men and had the power to decide all the matters alone. But actually, he never embarked on a new departure from the established policy without the consent of the Congress Working Committee. Even in 1922, when the tragic incident took place at Chauri Chaura, he summoned a meeting of the Congress workers at Bardoli on February 10, 1922 and discussed with them the propriety or otherwise of starting civil disobedience in the face of terrible happening
at Chauri Chaura.\textsuperscript{36} In its meeting on February 11 and 12, the Congress Working Committee, at his instance suspended the movement, and subsequently All-India Congress Committee endorsed the Bardoli resolution after a heated discussion. There was a great resentment over it in the Congress circle. Pt. Moti Lal Nehru, Lala Lajpat Rai, C.R. Das, Subhas Chandra Bose, Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru and many other Congress leaders criticised this action of Gandhi. He, too, was aware of the fact that the drastic reversal of the entire programme was likely to appear to his followers politically unsound and unwise. But he took the step because he considered it to be morally sound and sought to justify it. Gandhi had also realised that there was a strong undercurrent of violence in the country. The incident of Chauri Chaura was just like a straw indicating the direction in which the wind was blowing; it was symptomatic of the general temper of the mass mind which was steeped in violence and had not yet imbibed to any appreciable extent, the spirit of non-violence. He did not regard it as an isolated event. Subhas Chandra Bose and Jawahar Lal Nehru did not seem to realise that the non-cooperation movement was losing its non-violent character. He had the uncanny insight to see the writing on the wall which other leaders lacked.

\textsuperscript{36}The CWNE, Volume XXII, pp. 377-78.
When he realised that the movement was going out of the track, he applied the brake and cried a halt. There is nothing like concentrating the power around himself. Rather suspending the movement at the height of its popularity should be viewed as rejection of conventional power politics which assume concentration of power as its basic assumption.

Gandhi also suspended the civil disobedience movement in 1933-34. It is true that no duly elected body sanctioned the suspension of civil disobedience in 1933 for a good reason. The Congress was then an illegal organization, whose committees could not meet. But he did, even then consult a gathering at Poona of the few leading Congressmen who were not in prison. The movement was showing sign of exhaustion and also with a view to create an atmosphere favourable for opening negotiations with the Government, he advised the Acting Congress President to suspend the movement for six weeks. But when the Government did not yield there was no option left to Gandhi but to resume civil disobedience. But what was resumed was individual and not mass civil disobedience. However, in March 1934, he again advised all Congressmen to suspend the movement. In the observance of democratic procedure few leaders have been more scrupulous. He never bullied, never asserted himself,
never even raised his voice. The fact was, none the less, that his prestige was so immense, his magnetism so compelling, and the affection men bore him so genuine, that few cared to oppose him when once he had made up his mind.37 The suspension of the movement does not give the impression that Gandhi always acted on his own and did not care to consult his fellow colleagues. But even in this instance there is nothing like concentration of power by Gandhi and if analysed in the proper context, there appear to be no gap between his theory and practice.

The controversy over the election of Subhas Chandra Bose as Congress President in 1939 for the 2nd time also gave air to the belief that Gandhi never tolerated any challenge to his leadership. In a straight contest Bose had defeated Pattabhi Sitaramayya although Gandhi had put his whole weight in favour of Sitaramayya. In a statement to the Press, Gandhi admitted, "I must confess that from the very beginning I was decidedly against his re-election for reasons into which I need not go... And since I was instrumental in inducing Dr. Pattabhi not to withdraw his name, a candidate when Maulana Sahib withdrew, the defeat is mine more than his."38 The last sentence from this quote is unfortunate, the opponents of Gandhi argue that it introduces a personal element and makes the result of election a question of confidence in

38 Ibid, p.91.
Gandhi. The fact was that the defeat of Sitarayya was not actually the defeat of Gandhi. For Sitarayya was only the covering candidate and was hardly known especially in the North. The unexpected withdrawal of Asad created the difficulty. The electors were not aware that by electing Bose, they would be abandoning Gandhi. They simply elected the more known and popular who had earlier the support of Gandhi. They wanted to have both Bose and Gandhi, but more Gandhi than Bose as the subsequent events proved. There was no personal element in this struggle. It was a matter of privilege. For Gandhi knew that Bose was more inclined towards violence than non-violence and so with Bose at the helm of affairs Congress could convert itself to violent means which could be harmful to the Congress as well as to the country.

Whatever, might have been the intention of Gandhi in making the above statement it had an ominous significance. It resulted in the subsequent crossing of the floor by an appreciable number of delegates and consequently, Bose had to resign. Thus, it is argued in certain quarters that Gandhi should have shown the respect for the will of majority. Bose was duly elected and there was no bungling in the election. All the times Gandhi's will prevailed in connection with the election of
presidents of Congress and if for once someone was duly elected against his will he should bow. Tolerance and acceptance of the opinion of others is a basic assumption of the theory of decentralization. On one hand, he is arguing a complete decentralization but on the other he is not accepting the will of others. So all this, according to these circles, give a clear indication that Gandhi considered the election of Subhas Chandra Bose as a serious challenge to his leadership and this observation also is sufficient to point out a gap between his theory and practice.

But if the other side of the picture is analysed, a different conclusion emerges. This is true that Gandhi put all his weight behind Pattabhi Sitaramayya. There was a fundamental difference between the approaches of Gandhi and Bose. Even Bose did not make secret of his plans and policies. So, if one does not agree with the opinion of other one has every right to criticise him.

In the proper functioning of democratic institutions constructive criticism has a very important role to play. Criticism rather checks the despotic functioning of the opponent. Gandhi did not approve Bose's methods and policy, so he had every right to criticise him. What is more whenever Gandhi differed from anyone, he differed openly and unlike a conventional politician, he did not
hide his feelings. He believed in the openness of every thing. And to conclude that Gandhi had no faith in decentralisation of power, when his own power was challenged on the ground that he criticised Bose, is not a satisfactory approach. If the Congressmen followed him blindly, it is not because he pressurised them to follow but because everyone among them had realised that the surest way to keep the ranks united and to hold the masses together was to follow Gandhi loyally. Ever since Gandhi entered the political arena in India, the Congress began to preach his doctrines and other leaders were reduced to the secondary position. But all this does not mean that he did not care for the opinion of others. On the contrary, he gave due weight even to his political opponents. Several times, in order to accommodate the viewpoint of others, he modified his original stand. It is known to everybody that Gandhi was deadly against the partition of India in the beginning. But later on he gave due weightage to the opinion of others and completely changed his original stand.

All this show that although Gandhi wielded immense political power, yet, he was very much democratic in his functioning. He never used that power for his personal gain. No one, even his bitter critic, can allege
that he misused his powers. Such examples are rarely available in the history of world. So there is definitely no gap between his theory and practice from the point of view of decentralisation.

The working of certain voluntary associations set up by Gandhi also throw some light on the way he wielded power. In order to analyse the actual working of these organisations, the following two organisations are taken as a representative study of all voluntary organisations set up by Gandhi:

I. All-India Spinners' Association
II. All-India Village Industries Association.

All India Spinners' Association (A.I.S.A.) was established in 1925. It was specially a service organisation with economic objectives like development of hand spinning and promotion of Khaddar. Though an integral part of Indian National Congress, it was designed as a non-political body.

The association consisted of members, donors and associates. There were two classes of members A and B. A class consisted of persons above 18 years of age and habitually wearing Khadi, who deposited regularly from month to month with the treasurer or any agency duly appointed thereto by the Council 1000 yards of self spun yarn well-twisted and uniform. The class B consisted of
persons above 18 years of age habitually wearing Khadi, who paid an annual subscription of 2000 yards of self-spun yarn, well twisted and uniform. Above them was an Executive Council representing only 'A' class members not exceeding 12 in number. All policy decisions were taken by Council by majority of votes. Executive Council at the first instance consisted of nominated members for five years.

All India Village Industries Association was established in 1934 to revive and improve the village industries with its headquarter at Wardha. The Association though it was a creation of the Congress, had been made non-political and autonomous. Its members were pledged to abstain from any campaign of civil disobedience. The administration of the association was to be run by a board of management. The work of board of management was to be done through honorary agents. The agents had to select their own area of operation and they were expected to confine themselves to, and to concentrate their attention, on those areas only. Gandhi clarified that, "There may thus be an agent even for one single village. The Association may, therefore, have as many agents as there are villages in India. Therefore,

---

39 Young India, 1.10.1925, pp. 694-96.
no honest person, however humble, need to be deterred from offering his or her services. The idea is to decentralise the work as much as possible. At first instance the members of the board of management were nominated but later on it was an elected body. Workers participated in these elections and hence contributed to the management of the Association. The frequent consultation between the board of management and the workers gave ample opportunities to the workers to exert their pressure from the below and shape the policies and programme of the Association.

However, it appears that initially the Spinners' Association did not function democratically as it was a service institution and it had not yet taken strong roots. Even most of the members in the Congress did not fully subscribe to the principles underlying it. They supported it not because they had full faith in its objectives but because of their loyalty to Gandhi. The people at large were mostly sceptical about its success. Consequently, its functioning could not throw up such persons as could provide right leadership. In the beginning it was only a one man show. This is how Gandhi explains it "A careful study of it will show that it is, at the present moment, not only a democratic institution

but that in effect it is a one man's show. It may represent either the arrogance of the person who calls it into being such an institution or his absolute faith in the cause and in himself. So far as men can be aware of himself, I know that there is no arrogance in giving an autocratic character to the Association. Commercial bodies can never be democratic. And if hand-spinning is to become universal and successful in the country, its non-political and purely economic side must be now fully developed. It is true that it was purely a service institution and not a platform for satisfying one's desire for power and authority. According to him, "In a body in which there is no scope at all for any one to assume leadership and the only duty is that of service, there can be no rivalry for positions of authority. I wish that those whose one aim is to serve will send whatever suggestions they feel like making any time." One can understand Gandhi's initial difficulties in organizing a voluntary association and one man's rule may be permissible for some time. But it can not become a fundamental principle of the working of a voluntary association if we keep in view Gandhi's concept of political power. It will be wrong to eliminate the workers'...

42 Ibid., p.290.
participation in decision making. Consequently, he modified his approach in this regard when he launched All India Village Industries Association where he clearly emphasized the participative management. He was not in favour of any form of pyramid or apex type organization in which top presses upon the bottom. He favoured the dispersal of power in these organizations. The central office will be only a watch tower for the whole of India issuing instructions and not be a board of administration. It will act as a guide or a lamp that radiates light in all directions and helps to solve the problems at workers' level. It will be like a Correspondence school through which the various agents will carry on mutual exchange of thought and compare notes.