INDIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT AND GANDHISM -
A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL CRITIQUE

There are a lot of works on Gandhi. As it is not possible to review all of them, we try to critically examine only some. According to the nature of the works we have divided them into four separate sections: Nationalist, Marxist, Subaltern and Other works, i.e. which do not come under these categories. The division is made on the basis of the broad framework within which these works were written. The works of the admirers are not dealt with as we feel that it is not of much use for the present work.

SECTION-A: NATIONALIST PERSPECTIVES

Nationalist history of India was started as a reaction against the imperialist historiography. Till 1947 the nationalist school contributed very little to the study of the national movement because the colonial authorities never allowed them to express their anti-colonial feeling. So they had to confine themselves to the glorification of the Indian past. Even after 1947, however, the nationalist school has failed to make a major contribution at the analytical or historiographic level.
R.C. Majumdar finds it difficult to draw a line between nationalist and other national historians. Therefore, he considers it is better to restrict the use of the term to those Indians who are not purely or merely actuated by a scientific spirit to make a critical study of an historical problem concerning India, like any other country, but whose primary or even secondary objects include an examination or re-examination of some points of national interest or importance, particularly those on which full or accurate information is not available or which have been misunderstood, misconceived or wrongly represented. Such an object is not necessarily in conflict with a scientific and critical study, and a nationalist historian is not, therefore, necessarily a propagandist or a charlatan.”¹ According to I.D. Gaur “....those who glorify India’s past and eulogize the role of Indian National congress as the sole representatives of India’s struggle for freedom are the nationalist historians.”²

For our convenience we try to analyze the works of those Indian historians who in their attempt to write the history of the freedom movement, do not follow any rigorous ideology like the Marxists and those who write the Indian National Movement as a struggle between

British imperialism on the one hand and the Indian people on the other. All those historians, who have elaborated the role of the elitist group and who never gave any importance to the role of the masses also belong to this group.

The works of R.C. Majumdar, B.R. Nanda and Tara Chand can be taken up for analysis.

The third volume of R.C. Majumdar's *History of the Freedom Movement in India* begins with the history of the emergence of Mahatma Gandhi as the leader of the movement in 1919. He says that Gandhi combined in himself the dual role of a saint and an active politician and according to him it poses a serious problem to the historian. He criticizes the followers of Gandhi for giving too much importance to the saintly character of Gandhi. In his work he is attempting to make a distinction between the political and saintly aspect of the Gandhian leadership – "I have necessarily to view his life and activities, thoughts, and feelings primarily from a narrow angle, namely as a politician and statesman leading a great political organization which was not intended to be a humanitarian association or World Peace Society, but had been formed.

---

for a definite political object, namely to achieve India’s freedom from political bondage.” Majumdar splits Gandhian personality into two: Gandhi as a saint and Gandhi as an active politician. He says that a historian has nothing to do with the first and so is concerned only with the second aspect. From his arguments itself, it proves that his work forms only a partial aspect of the movement because it is impossible to judge Gandhi without considering the saintly qualities of Gandhi. And it also becomes clear from his own arguments that “…Gandhi’s magic personality and saintly character which has always a great appeal to Indian masses, transformed the latent energy of the people into strenuous political activity in an astonishingly short period of time.” From his arguments itself it becomes clear that it was such a personality of Gandhi played a dominant role in his political movements. How far it is possible to analyze only the political aspect without considering the saintly aspect?

Majumdar very sharply criticized Gandhi for making Khilafat question a chief problem for organizing a movement against British. “As regard the Khilafat question, it was the height of political unwisdom to make it a chief plank or problem in the struggle for freedom waged by

---

4 Ibid., p. xviii
5 Ibid., p. xx.
India against the British. Moreover he accuses Gandhi for having played a dual role – a non-cooperator as a Khilafatist, and a co-operator as a Congressman. According to him Gandhi while giving importance to Hindu-Muslim unity completely ignored ‘the fundamental differences’ between them, which was a deep-rooted one. Here Majumdar failed to perceive that a large-scale unity of Hindus and Muslims was required for organizing a movement. Moreover Gandhi based his entire policy upon Hindu-Muslim unity. Majumdar like the communalists considers Hindus and Muslims as two different nationalities. It is all because of his wrong perception of communal question.

But in his opinion no one could deny the two great results of Non-Cooperation movement that (1) the “Congress movement had become a really mass movement” and (2) “the Indian National Congress was, almost overnight, turned into a genuine revolutionary organization.”

Majumdar considers Gandhi as a dictator who could not tolerate opposition. He says that the activities of Gandhi very well prove it. Gandhi never wanted to include any one, who was against his policies, in

---

6 Ibid., p.91
7 Ibid., p. xxiv
8 Ibid., p. 189.
9 Ibid., p. xxii.
the Congress working committee. He weakened the leftists by winning over Jawaharlal Nehru. And he made the All-India Congress Committee accept his demands. It is correct that from 1919 onwards Gandhi designed the policies of the Congress. And a majority of Congressmen obeyed him without questioning his authority. Even at times when some of the members found it difficult to agree with Gandhi’s views and policy, they obeyed him because there was not a single leader who could lead the organization as efficiently as Gandhi did. Gandhi’s presence in the Indian National Congress was domineering. But one has to analyze in detail what made Gandhi the sole leader of Indian National Congress. Then only one could form an idea of the nature of leadership provided by Gandhi.

Majumdar adopted a communal approach to the problem especially while dealing with Non-Cooperation Movement and communal questions. According to Bipan Chandra it is better to call him a communal historian than a nationalist historian. Majumdar in his entire work tried to find out only the negative side of the movement.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., pp.529-530 and p.379.
Another historian who belongs to this category is B.R. Nanda. Nanda tried to find out the positive side of the movement. He says that in both the Champaran Satyagraha and Ahmedabad Mill Strike, even though Gandhi had to make compromise with the planters and mill owners the ultimate victory was of the peasants and the employees. Nanda says that in both these movements the tactical surrender on the part of Gandhi proved to be a strategical triumph.\footnote{B.R. Nanda, \textit{Mahatma Gandhi - A Biography}, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1982, pp.161-165}

Nanda tries to find out the positive side of the Kheda Satyagraha. Even though one feels that the calling-off of the no-tax campaign "as a face-saving device and a tame end to a campaign begun with high hopes" it had some good results - "it awakened the peasantry of Gujarat, Gandhi's province of birth, to a consciousness of its strength and gave it a great leader in Vallabhai Patel".\footnote{Ibid., p. 167} Nanda says that Gandhi localized these conflicts so as not to embarrass the Government while the World War I was going on. According to him for a proper perspective of these early movements one has to remember this.\footnote{Ibid., p.167}
In Nanda’s opinion ‘Non-Cooperation’ was an incomplete and in certain ways a misleading description of a movement which was intended not only to dismantle some institutions but also to replace them with others.\(^\text{15}\) He criticized those who were against the stoppage of the Non-cooperation movement. According to him “Few of the critics could see that Chauri Chaura was not the cause, but only the occasion for the reverse gear which he had applied.”\(^\text{16}\) Non-Violence was so dear to Gandhi. Before launching the movement he gave much importance to non-violence in his whole speeches and articles.

Nanda also, like Tara Chand, praises the Salt Satyagraha organized by Gandhi. “Those who had scoffed at Salt Satyagraha and failed to see any connection between Salt and Swaraj had underrated Gandhi’s knack for organizing the Indian masses for corporate action.”\(^\text{17}\)

He justifies Gandhi for signing the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. He says that in Satyagraha movements a compromise with the opponent is neither heresy nor treason, but a natural and necessary step the object of satyagraha was, however, not to achieve the physical elimination or moral breakdown of an adversary but, through suffering at his hands, to initiate

\(^{15}\) Ibid., p. 204.  
\(^{16}\) Ibid., p. 232.  
\(^{17}\) Ibid., p. 297.
those psychological processes which could make it possible for minds and hearts to meet.\(^\text{18}\) Another point where he justifies or agrees with Gandhi was the theory of trusteeship. He considers it a “radical theory which called for voluntary sacrifices from the ‘haves’ in the interest of ‘have-nots’.”\(^\text{19}\) In his analyses he didn’t try to consider the practicability of such a theory.

But he questions the feasibility of applying the non-violent technique to foreign aggression. Gandhi sticks to his non-violent technique even during the Second World War. But later Gandhi agreed to station the ‘Allied troops’ on Indian soil.\(^\text{20}\)

According to Nanda Gandhi followed non-violent method ‘not only because an unarmed people had little chance of success in an armed rebellion, but because he considered violence a clumsy weapon which created more problems than it solved, and left a trial of hatred and bitterness in which genuine reconciliation was almost impossible.’\(^\text{21}\)

Nanda’s work is a biographical one. In his work he always looked at the positive side of the movement. From his work it seems Gandhian

\(^{18}\) Ibid., p. 308  
\(^{19}\) Ibid., p. 380  
\(^{20}\) Ibid., pp. 433, 461  
\(^{21}\) Ibid., p. 515
leadership didn’t have any drawbacks. It forms only a narration of the life and his political activities. As an uncritical work it gives only a partial view. He didn’t try to analyze the whole thing in an objective manner. He tried to vindicate each and every action of Gandhi. In this manner it stands just opposite to the views of Majumdar.

Tara Chand’s perception of Gandhism is a more objective analysis when compared to the ones already discussed.

In order to understand the course and character of the extraordinary movement launched, directed and sustained by Gandhi, Tara Chand says, “It is necessary to analyze the nature and courses of the amazing influence which he exercised over the minds of the Indian people as well as his numerous admirers abroad.\textsuperscript{22} And it is this influence which helped him to rouse the million to offer supreme sacrifice and to call a halt when he found that they were exceeding the limits.

For Gandhi religion meant everything. According to Tara Chand, Gandhi’s politics become an enigma if considered apart from his religious

\textsuperscript{22} Tara Chand, \textit{History of Freedom Movement in India}, Vol. III, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi, 1972, p. 191
background.”\textsuperscript{23} He says that Gandhiji’s views on religion are utmost importance as they governed all his political activity.\textsuperscript{24} He tries to find out the limitation of this religious base and considers this as a threat to secularism. According to him “…to cover politics with the atmosphere of a particular religion is to create psychological obstacles in the evolution of secularism and thereby to strengthen the forces of communalism.\textsuperscript{25} He considers this as a serious limitation of his political ideas.

Gandhi believed in absolute truth and Non-violence and he was very particular in keeping absolute truth and non-violence in his movements. Tarachand considers Gandhi’s belief in absolute truth and non-violence as a crucial limitation. For ordinary people it is impossible to function on this plain. So leaders must make compromise with the principles and adjust their actions to the capacity and character of ordinary man. But Gandhi failed in understanding the attitude of the common people “…Gandhiji always chose absolutely true ends and non-violent means. He disregarded human weaknesses. He did not realize that only rare individuals can remain dedicated throughout life to high ideals, and although the multitude may be momentarily impelled into a mood of

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 202
\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 205
\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 207
exaltation, it cannot maintain it for a long time. His neglect of realities was responsible for his frustrations.\textsuperscript{26}

Tara Chand says that in every movement organized by Gandhi, he failed in getting the desired results. According to him “the satyagraha of 1919 for the repeal of the Rowlatt Act was pronounced ‘a Himalayan miscalculation.’ That of 1920 ended in the tragedy of Chauri Chaura and failed to rectify the Punjab wrong or to satisfy the Khiilafatists’ demands. The Salt Satyagraha which was undertaken to establish Poorna Swaraj (complete independence) led instead to the Gandhi-Irwin Pact which lured Gandhi to futile cooperation with an impossible Round Table conference.

The Civil Disobedience movement which lasted from 1930 to 1934 with a short break in 1931, the Satyagraha offered by individualism 1940-41 and the Quit India resolution of 1942 which did not ensure in a campaign, had little impact.\textsuperscript{27}

From his works it seems that Gandhi failed in organizing a movement successfully. Even though he criticized the futility of Gandhi’s movements he did not want to conclude “the Satyagrahas were sterile efforts.” He argues that “India’s fight had a two-fold aspect. From the

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., p. 219
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., p. 220
external point of view it was a struggle to end the domination and rule of a foreign power. But essentially it was a moral struggle.\textsuperscript{28}

He criticizes Gandhi for inaugurating Non-cooperation campaign in support of the Khilafat movement. According to him "unfortunately neither Gandhiji nor the Indian Khilafatist realized that their objective was neither politically practicable nor wholly justified."\textsuperscript{29} Gandhi's desire to secure permanent unity by cooperating with the Muslims in the Khilafat agitation had little chance of fulfillment. The causes of the communal antagonism were deep.\textsuperscript{30} Gandhiji tried to secure Hindu-Muslim unity without understanding the deep rooted communal antagonism of these two religions.

He justifies the stoppage of Non-cooperation because of its practical aspect. He says that "Apparently the Congress organization was losing control and the masses were moving towards anarchy and chaos. It was necessary to assert the leadership of the Congress so that it might be possible to revive the movement in future. Mass violence could only bring

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., p. 220
\item\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., p. 419
\item\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., p. 428
\end{itemize}
about bloodshed on a large scale, and the demoralization which would
follow would be worse than that after the Revolt of 1857.\textsuperscript{31}

He praises Gandhi for organizing a movement like Salt Satyagraha—"No commander of military plan of operations could have done better. The salt Satyagraha had all the elements of high class strategy—surprise, universal mobilization of forces, discipline, organization, simplicity of tactics and universal availability of means and instruments of war, challenging and surrounding the forces of the enemy from all side, drama. A strange war in which the losses and causalities and suffering were all on one side."\textsuperscript{32}

Even though he says that non-violence was so dear to Gandhiji even than Swaraj\textsuperscript{33} he questions the way Gandhi and his followers campaigned to start the Quit India movement. He asks "The movement was to be a struggle— a fight to finish, to end foreign domination, and all methods of mass movement from general strikes to stoppage of trains, nonpayment of revenues, tampering with the loyalty of civil service and the army were to be resorted to. How could such a movement remain non-

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., p. 423
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., p. 423
violent? The entire phraseology used by Gandhi and his lieutenants was provocative and associated with violence. They wished to launch a violent movement of an all-India nature.34

Finally, Tara Chand points out two great results that Gandhi's movements had achieved. In the first place they had removed the illusion of the British that their empire was morally justified, that its beneficence, though denied by the few, was recognized by the Indian masses, that the majority of them were loyal and desired the continuation of British. Gandhi had succeeded by his non-violent effort to convince them that they had to quit. The second result was that through non-violent and hate-free character of the struggle, it prevented the growth of war-psychosis. Instead of rousing the passion for violence these movements led to the realization of the futility of violent methods.35

Tara Chand offers a somewhat balanced view. He neither tries to praise Gandhi's activities nor tries to belittle his efforts. He gives narration of the whole movement without making critical study of the various aspects of the movement.

34 Ibid., p. 387
35 Ibid., pp. 399 – 400
The works of the nationalist historians largely remained un-critical and non-analytical. Even though they consider economic exploitation as one of the important cause for the rise of Indian nationalism they failed to give a materialistic interpretation to the whole movement. Bipan Chandra considers that one of their major failures has been their “inability to grasp the class aspects of Indian society (and the implication this had for the national movement), even while legitimately underlining the unity of all Indians in their struggle against imperialism.” According to I.D. Gaur “The nationalist historiography on Gandhi and his movement simply view Gandhi as charismatic. But no where it unfolds the socio-cultural context of the charismatic leadership.”

Nationalist historians give only an uncritical or naive picture of Gandhian leadership. They never tried to point out the efforts and sacrifices made by the common people. Nationalist historiography lacks a rigorous theoretical framework. Altogether it forms only a narration of events and an uncritical depiction of the efficiency of Gandhi in leading the movement.

---

36 Bipan Chandra, op. cit., p. 235
37 I.D. Gaur, op. cit., p. 77
SECTION B: MARXIST PERSPECTIVES

Marxist historians give us an altogether different view of Gandhism and the method of struggle Gandhi adopted, his role in the politicization of Indian masses. They also consider the Indian National movement as a bourgeois led movement and Gandhi as the leader of bourgeoisie. Even though one may find it difficult to agree with some of the views of the Marxist historians, it sometimes provides a very objective analysis of certain aspects of Gandhism. They bring out the limitations of Gandhism and some of the techniques of Gandhi and also tried to analyze some of the aspects which the nationalist historians and Gandhians usually tried to exaggerate for example about the mobilization of the masses during the Gandhian phase of the Indian National movement. Some of the basic questions which the Marxist historians had undertaken in their studies were whether Gandhi’s leadership limited the scope of the National Movement? Even after the active mobilization of masses why certain sections of the population remained aloof from the mainstream of Indian National Movement? What made Gandhiji to follow a policy which ultimately helped the class interests of the bourgeoisie?
Even though, S.A. Dange made a comparison of Gandhi and Lenin in 1920s itself, "M.N. Roy was the first Marxist to evaluate Gandhi's role in Indian politics strictly from the Marxist perspective."\(^{38}\)

S.A. Dange in his study tries to place the role of masses in the national movement on lofty plane and also analyzed the part played by the actions of the masses in bringing forth Gandhi's innate qualities of leadership. To quote him "Gandhi learnt from the masses and led them."\(^{39}\) According to him it was the actions of masses which helped in formulating the techniques that is to be adopted in the coming movements.

Dange criticizes the way Gandhi had withdrawn the Non-Cooperation movement. But once he understood the mistake he had committed and how the British took advantage of his policy of non-violence, he never repeated the similar mistake in his political career. He never made non-violence a necessary pre-condition of any of his later movements. According to Dange Gandhi made such a deviation in his methods because the masses never accepted his per-condition of ahimsa.

---


"Violence and non-violence ceased to be the decisive and determining factors in his direction of mass movements, after seeing the disastrous effects of his line in 1921, though he continued to preach as before."\(^{40}\)

Dange's analysis was in a typical Marxist style. He does not want to consider Gandhi a sole force in making Indian National Movement a successful one. Moreover when we go through his studies, it seems that he was not giving due consideration to the effective leadership given by Gandhi in the very crucial phase of the National movement, but exaggerated the role of the masses in the National Movement.

Another Marxist historian, A.R. Desai in his analysis tried to establish that Indian Nationalism was governed by bourgeois class outlook and Gandhi's policies and that methods always helped the bourgeois in safeguarding their class interests. From his view it seems that Gandhi formulated his policies in such a way as to serve the aims and interests of bourgeoisie – "The ideology of Gandhi, its political theory, economic doctrine, and ethical views, arose out of the historical needs of the national bourgeoisie."\(^{41}\)

\(^{40}\) Ibid., p. 8  
In spite of pointing out the limitation of Gandhi he wanted to signify the role Gandhi played in mass mobilization—“He was the first national leader who recognized the role of the masses and mass action in the struggle for national liberation in contrast to earlier leaders...”42 and making national movement a multi-class movement. “He...made, for the first time, the Indian nationalist movement a multi-class and mass nationalist movement in spite of its limitations due to his ideology.”43

Even though A. R. Desai considers some of the basic elements of Gandhism as anti-progressive and against the forward march of history, he provides a somewhat balanced view about the role of Gandhi in the national movement. But he tried to give too much importance to the bourgeois character of the movement. Instead of analyzing what made Gandhi serve the interests of the bourgeoisie and the circumstances which made him to design his policies according to the interests of bourgeoisie he simply criticized Gandhi for accepting the leadership of the bourgeoisie.

Another Marxist scholar who analyzed Gandhism in a detailed manner was E.M.S. Namboodiripad. A follower of Gandhi in his early days, E. M. S. later became an ardent follower of Communism.

42 Ibid., p. 347
43 Ibid., p. 347
E.M.S. also, like other Marxist scholars, considered Gandhi as a representative of the bourgeoisie but at the same time he did not say that ‘Gandhiji had any aim to protect the interests of bourgeoisie.’\textsuperscript{44} May be, Gandhi truly believed that he was not protecting the interests of a particular class or community on the other hand he believed that he was protecting the interests of a nation as a whole. But the question is that what were the results of his practical activities?\textsuperscript{45}

E. M. S. also considers mass mobilization as one thing which makes Gandhi different from other leaders. He got inspiration from the simple and sincere works of common man. Gandhi identified himself as one among the common man which enabled him to ‘follow a particular political ideology which was different from that of the ‘extremists’ and the ‘moderates’.\textsuperscript{46}

Even though E. M. S. gives due importance to the part played by Gandhi in mass mobilization he argues that the political consciousness of masses was not just because of Gandhi’s task but he considers it as ‘a result of some events occurred in India as well as because of some

\textsuperscript{44} E. M. S. Namboodiripad, \textit{Gandhiyum Gandhisavum} (in Malayalam), Chitha Publishers, Trivandrum, 1994, p. 10
\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 10
\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 52
international events'. But he considers that Gandhi’s mass mobilization was of a limited nature. Gandhi tried to confine the activities of mass. According to E. M. S. ‘he was very particular about that the mass should work under the leadership of bourgeoisie’.48

E.M.S. tries to show the importance given to the interest bourgeois by Gandhi and the Congress. He says that it is very clear from the resolution in connection with the Non-cooperation movement that was designed to be led by the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. He sees in it the basic technique of Gandhi that is making compromise with the imperialist regime. E.M.S. says ‘the non-violent non-cooperation movement was envisaged as a programme to compel the authorities to make compromise with congress rather than as something which could expel imperialist regime.’49 Gandhi adopted this technique of making compromise with the imperialists with the support of restricted mass struggle.

Gandhiji always worked according to the interests of the bourgeois.50 E.M.S. considers this as a reason which made Gandhi to turn

47 Ibid., p. 221
48 Ibid., p. 223
49 Ibid., p. 66
50 Ibid., pp. 124-125
his attention from the Civil Disobedience movement to a comparatively lesser problem of the upliftment of Harijans. As against this he also argues that Gandhi adopted such a method to overcome the existing political crisis and thereby to re open a channel to make discussions with the British. 'With this aim in mind he selected the Harijans upliftment programme which had both political and social character.'

Here his views are contradictory. On the one hand he says that Gandhi deviated his attention from the political path to social problems in order to protect the interests of the bourgeoisie and on the other he says that it was a clear thought out political strategy to overcome the existing critical situation. Can we consider it as a strategy adopted to overcome the political crisis which indirectly benefited the bourgeois?

E.M.S. analyses the change in Gandhian leadership during the period of the Congress ministries. After retiring from active politics, while the Civil Disobedience was going on, Gandhi devoted his energy in the constructive programme. But when the Congress ministries were formed in 1937 Gandhi made certain change in his policy. E.M.S. considers it as a new phase of Gandhian leadership: - 'even though he remained outside

---

51 Ibid., p. 126
the Congress officially, he was there as an important guiding force behind the various Congress ministries.\textsuperscript{52}

Another historian of this field was Hiren Mukerjee. He also dealt with certain limitations of Gandhism. In his opinion Gandhi feared that once the working class enters the field the movement will go out of the limits of the Indian bourgeoisie. But at the same time he did not want to argue that Gandhi was the conscious and willing tool of the bourgeoisie—“Gandhi was perhaps no conscious tool in the bourgeoisie’s hands, but for his entire predilection for ‘civil revolution’ whatever that might precisely mean, his objective and that of the Indian bourgeoisie basically coincided.”\textsuperscript{53}

Considering the causes for the failure of the Non-cooperation movement, he says that “It is clear that Gandhi and his colleagues feared and disliked the awakening activity and militancy of the masses. This, indeed, was a principal reason of the failure of the non-cooperation.”\textsuperscript{54} That is why, while awakening the masses against the imperialists, he tried to contain their activities so as to avoid their independent actions which

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., p. 143
\textsuperscript{53} Hiren Mukerjee, \textit{Gandhiji - A Study}, People’s Publishing House, New Delhi, 1979, p.61
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., p.73
would endanger the existing social relations, which was in favour of the bourgeoisie. Pointing out the contradictory character of Gandhi he said: “...this man who spoke out so magnificently against the exploitation of India’s masses largely did what the exploiting interests wanted.”

Hiren Mukerjee didn’t try to undermine the political activities of Gandhi. He also considers him as the only leader who succeeded in waking up Indians from their deep slumber. But with his methods Gandhi restricted the revolutionary aspects of the national movement. He didn’t consider that India could have been free by the Gandhian methods of Satyagraha alone, without the support of other factors. When comparing the views of the already mentioned Marxist scholars he is not trying to give exaggerated importance to the bourgeois character of the Gandhian leadership.

Madhu Dandavate analyzed the differences between Marxism and Gandhism. According to him, in Marxism, violence occupies an important position but Gandhism was based on the principle of non-violence.

Madhu Dandavate considers the effectiveness of non-violent struggles in involving a wider section in the movement. He says “Gandhi

---

55 Ibid., p. 73
56 Madhu Dandavate, Marx and Gandhi, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1977, p. 49
learnt from his experience that in violent revolutions there is no involvement of the widest sections of the people...on the other hand, the non-violent struggles of Gandhi’s conception draw vast sections of the population within the ambit of struggle either directly or indirectly." But Dandavate did not want to consider that the technique of Satyagraha would work effectively under dictatorial systems.

Irfan Habib holds a somewhat different view about Gandhism, than the already mentioned Marxist scholars. He considers Gandhi as a modern thinker. Gandhi was well acquainted with western thoughts and it had a very important impact on his methods than the Indian traditions had on him.

Habib says that with the coming of Gandhi national movement entered into an important phase. He considers Gandhi as a bourgeois but ‘the aim of his political and social stratagem was directed in a different way.’ According to him ‘even though the content of Gandhian thought was against imperialism and capitalism, his aim was not up to socialism. Therefore, in essence, he confined himself to a bourgeois framework.'

57 Ibid., pp. 50 - 51
58 Irfan Habib, ‘Gandhiyum Deshiya Prasthanavum Muthal Socialisathe Kuriculla Marxian Sidhantam Vare’ (in Malayalam), Chithra Publishers, Trivandrum, 1996, p.18
59 Ibid., p.18
Irfan Habib tries to vindicate the policies adopted by Gandhi in the Kheda Satyagraha, Ahmedabad mill strike by saying that ‘even a great Marxist also has to make compromises if the situation asks for that.’

He considers that Gandhiji played an important part in giving Congress a left orientation. On the ground that he accepted the Karachi resolution and with that he accepted the promises which the Congress had given to peasantry and trade union. But like most of the Marxist thinkers he also believes that the call for ‘Quit India’ was a wrong decision made at a wrong time.

His view that Gandhi gave a left orientation to Congress was entirely different from the views of other Marxist scholars. Most of the Marxist historians believe that Gandhi was trying to give much importance to the right wing elements and to their interests and policies and Gandhi tried to contain the growth of left ideology.

Bhagwan Josh, apart from all these already mentioned Marxist scholars tried to analyze the Gandhian leadership in a completely different manner. Even though he also belongs to the Marxist school he in his analysis provided a different outlook.

60 Ibid., p. 21
61 Ibid., p. 24
According to him the politics of Gandhian era can be best understood through the paradigm of mass movements, the external thrust of which is non-violence. His view is that Gandhi adopted a different method of struggle on the basis of his conception of the colonial state. "Gandhi was convinced that without the consent of the Indians it was almost impossible for the British to rule India with the help of armed forces."\(^6^2\)

Bhagwan Josh adopted concepts of Gramsci in analyzing the Gandhian strategy.\(^6^3\) According to which Gandhi was fighting a different kind of war – 'the war of position'. The strategy of the pre-Gandhian phase of Indian National Movement was that of a constitutional opposition. Gandhi evolved a new paradigm to confront the colonial state, the character of which was a 'semi-hegemonic'\(^6^4\) type, the paradigm of peaceful movements "Here was a strategy which was neither insurrectionary, nor constitutionalist. In the language of Marxism it was


\(^6^3\) According to I. D. Gaur from 1985 onwards the neo Marxists (Bipan Chandra and Bhagwan Josh) appropriate Gramsci's concepts for the analytical explanation of Gandhi. See I. D. Gaur, *op. cit.*, p.99

\(^6^4\) Bhagwan Josh, *op. cit.*, p. 51
neither ‘revolutionary’ nor ‘reformist’ but a strategy of ‘revolutionary reformism’, or the transformation of the state.”

According to him Gandhi was a permanent non-constitutionalist and occupied a far more complex position between the left and right fringes. With his position Gandhiji succeeded in keeping left-right unity and in extending its social base by united anti-imperialist mobilization.

Bhagwan Josh adopted concepts of Gramsci while analyzing the political movements organized by Gandhi and he tried to equate it with a war of position. In his analyses he failed to find out the autonomous roots of Gandhi’s non-violence as an ideology. Gramsci’s concepts were made in a different context. So actually Bhagwan Josh decontextualized the Gramscian revolutionary concepts.

Bipan Chandra tried to theorize the techniques adopted by Gandhi. He follows a somewhat objective approach while dealing with the effectiveness of Gandhian method of struggle. According to him the method Gandhi adopted was on the basis of his understanding of the semi hegemonic character of the colonial state.

---

65 Ibid., p. 52
66 Ibid., p. 57
According to him, political passivity of the masses was a basic factor in the stability and safety of colonial rule. In order to carry out the struggle successfully the masses had to be mobilized. And Gandhi tried to do this: "A major objective of the movements of the Gandhian era was to bring the masses into active politics and political action."\(^\text{67}\)

He views that even though Gandhi based his entire politics on the militancy and self-sacrificing spirit he too attained a little success in mobilizing the masses completely – "I may hazard the opinion that the agricultural labourers and poor peasants in most parts of the country and the masses in general in several parts were not brought into the political process or even touched by nationalist politics, so that the social base of the national movement was still not very strong in 1947."\(^\text{68}\)

Bipan Chandra described Gandhian strategy as Struggle-Truce-Struggle.\(^\text{69}\) According to him Gandhian strategy was based on the assumption that a mass movement could not be carried on for a long time because the masses involved in the movement invariably got exhausted

---


\(^{\text{68}}\) Bipan Chandra, *Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India*, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1996, p.130

\(^{\text{69}}\) Earlier in 1972 he described this strategy as pressure-Compromise-Pressure (P-C-P). He says that at that time he was trying to make the initial break with existing Marxian analysis and was therefore not able to get rid of all the cobwebs. See Bipan Chandra, *Indian...*, p.29
after some time. So they need a "breathing time" to consolidate, recuperate and gather strength for the next round of struggle. Thus the withdrawal or a shift forms an inherent part of a strategy of political action that was based on the masses. But he says that the critics of Gandhian leadership failed in understanding the strategic design of Gandhian method of struggle and that is why they often criticized Gandhi for this type of withdrawals — "...they have looked for sources of decisions regarding withdrawals in class bias or essence, class pressure, betrayal, tendency to compromise with imperialism, loss of nerve, moral compunction, etc., and not in strategic design itself."

Bipan Chandra considers the constructive work also as a part of the overall Gandhian strategy. "It played a crucial role during the 'passive phase' in filling the political space left vacant by the withdrawal of Civil Disobedience..."

Unlike other Marxist writers, Bhagwan Josh and Bipan Chandra analyzed various aspects of Gandhism in a very liberal manner. Bipan Chandra was not interested in criticizing the bourgeois leadership, as the other Marxists scholars did. But at the same time he too believes like

---

70 Ibid., p. 35
71 Ibid., p. 37
other Marxists that actions of masses were restricted by the top order, which was under the influence of the bourgeoisie.

According to Marxists, Indian National Movement was a bourgeois led movement and Gandhi as a bourgeois leader. But, it is to be analyzed in detail before agreeing with the Marxists that Gandhi designed his method of struggle to suit the vested interests of the bourgeoisie. Even while criticizing the class character of the movement, A.R. Desai also identifies the progressive role of bourgeoisie in a colonial state like India. It is also because of their understanding of the progressive role of the bourgeoisie which led them to adopt a United Front Policy in 1930s. This shows the importance of the support of bourgeoisie in leading a movement against imperialism.

Another aspect which the Marxist scholars stressed was mass mobilization. Even though they consider Gandhi was the first leader who successfully mobilized the masses they argue that the role assigned to them limited the independent actions of the masses. The actions of masses were restricted from the top. And because of that the entire political activities confined within the bourgeois leadership.
Was it possible for a country like India to fight against imperialism by adopting violent methods? And how far was it possible to mobilize every section of the society by giving equal importance to their interest, all of which have contradictory interests? What would be an effective alternative leadership to Gandhian leadership? — were some of the questions that the Marxists failed in critically analyzing.

SECTION C: SUBALTERN PERSPECTIVES

The history written by Subalternist historians is different from the elitist historiography. Subalterntist’s demand the “de-elitization” of history. It assumes that the elitist bias, open or insidious, has placed history at the service of the dominant or hegemonic classes and banished the rest from history or rendered them aphonic. Subalternist historians claim that their analysis is entirely different from the elitist historiography. In some of its analysis it stands close to Marxist type. Marxists and Subalternists enjoy a somewhat similar view regarding the importance of the Gandhian leadership and also about the role assigned to the common people in the National movement. Subalternist historians in their work gave importance to the attitude of the common people towards the movement and the rural base of the movement. So they took local
issues, which were confined, to a particular region to show the spontaneous nature of the movement. While the nationalist leaders trying to give importance to the educated elites in organizing and leading the movement there by considering the common people as passive elements, the Marxists were of the opinion that the mass mobilization was not at the initiative of the educated upper class alone but a response coming from the socio-economic structure of the colonial Indian society. But the Subalternists tried to depict how the traditional, religious, conservative, orthodox community reacted against the exploitation and they tried to analyze the influence of the nationalist ideology with their narrow outlook.

Ranajit Guha in his introductory essay in *Subaltern Studies I* criticized the nationalist historians’ view that the entire movement was organized at the behest of the educated urban intelligentsia and it was these people who mobilized the masses. According to him “The history of Indian nationalism is thus written up as a sort of spiritual biography of the Indian elite.” In Guha’s opinion the elitist historiography failed to find out “the contribution made by the people on their own, that is, independently of the elite to the making and development of this

---

nationalism. 73 He says that the politics of the people "was an autonomous domain, for it neither originated from elite politics nor did its significance depend on the latter." 74 (Here one has to consider whether the breaking of the limit set by the politician and elites can be taken as an autonomous domain). In fact, Ranajit Guha forcefully argued that "one-sided and blinkered historiography" which projected Indian nationalism as "a sort of spiritual biography of the Indian elite" has "failed to explain Indian nationalism for us." That is elitist historiography failed to understand the problem of mobilization. His main reproach against the elitist historiography is that it fails to admit or record the failure of the Indian bourgeoisie to speak for the nation. 75 The Subalternist historians' claim that the mass mobilization took place not just because of the activities of the elite. They want to consider it as a spontaneous development or independent of any outside manipulation. Sumit Sarkar says that "The 'Cambridge' assumption that factions explain everything since local 'patrons' have a kind of inherent and automatic capacity for mobilizing their 'clients', as well as the standard nationalist interpretation in terms of mobilization from the top by the patriotic leaders or ideologies

73 Ibid., p. 3
74 Ibid., p. 4
75 Ibid., p. 5
share in common a serious underestimation of the popular initiative." According to Gyan Pandey "...many of the most important peasant insurrections in the country were largely autonomous and that the intervention of 'outside' leaders was a marginal and often, a late phenomenon." 

But one will find it very difficult to agree with the view of the Subalternists that the several local movements were spontaneous. We can't deny the fact that it was this educated upper class who gave political education to the rural masses and it was these people who took the initiative in waking them up from their deep slumber, it was they who taught the people to react against the domination. But the way they acted, the way they interpreted the ideology of these elites were different and once they were initiated they did everything according to their independent thought but even then it was restricted from the top.

Gyan Pandey in his article, 'Peasant Revolt and Indian Nationalism, 1919-1922', which deals with the revolt of the peasants of Awadh, comments on certain limitations of Gandhism, the 'anti-peasant' attitude

---


of Gandhi and the instructions that he had given to the peasants to be followed while participating in a movement.\textsuperscript{78}

Faith in Mahatma gave the peasants strength to question the might of their planters and landlords. The reverence for Gandhi is undoubtedly partly due to the belief that he has great influence with the government. The peasants believed that Gandhi was sent by the government to remove the grievances of the peasant. "The curious thing is that as a general rule Gandhi is not thought of as being antagonistic to Government, but only to the zamindars."\textsuperscript{79} What Gyan Pandey wants to point out here is that the contradiction between what Gandhi stood for and what peasants thought about him. So the support of the peasants to Gandhi was not because of that he was against the colonial authority but because of the belief that he came to emancipate the peasants from the clutches of their overlords. Peasants' immediate oppressors were zamindars. But what actually Gandhi wanted to do was a class collaboration of peasants and zamindars.

The stand that Gandhi adopted while dealing with the confrontation between the peasant and landlords is much debatable. After the outbreak of violence at various places, Gandhi sought to restore peace by asking

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., pp. 157,160,187.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., p. 197
the peasants to surrender voluntarily. But no corresponding sacrifice was demanded of the landlords. It indicated in Gandhi's view, "...the peasant bore the responsibility for the preservation of non violence and for its breakdown in any situation of clash with the authorities." Gandhi himself asked the peasants to bear a little if the zamindars torment them and not to fight against the zamindars. Because, they, Gandhi and other Congress leaders, did not want to encourage such class struggles and they were of the opinion that such struggles should be abandoned altogether in the interests of 'unity' in their struggle against the British. But it is obvious that the landlords and officials stood shoulder to shoulder against the peasants. Yet, the Congress sought the support of the landlords in their struggle against the British.

Actually Pandey was trying to find out the 'anti-peasant' attitude of Gandhi in the instructions which he had given to the peasant. In his opinion Gandhi was trying to make the peasants speak for zamindars and Gandhi was not interested in dealing with the questions regarding the problems of peasantry. Marxist historians argued that Gandhi made only lip service to the peasantry and he never gave any serious concern for the

80 Ibid., p. 157
81 Gyan Pandey says that in the traditional nationalist historiography the sectional struggles "of peasants and workers and other labouring and exploited classes were out of step with the primary need of the 'nation' at that stage in its history - the need to advance the anti-imperialist movement." Ibid., pp. 151-152.
grievances of the peasantry. But they failed to analyze whether the existing environment is conducive to start such a struggle at a time when the anti-imperialist movement was gaining its strength.

But whatever be the attitude of Gandhi towards peasants the presence of Gandhi and rumours regarding the achievements of Gandhi in Champaran formed a source of inspiration for the Awadh peasants during early 1920s. Yet, one must not exaggerate the role of the urban politician in the growth of the national movement. The peasants acted independently on the basis of their own understanding of Gandhism and interpretation of Swaraj. “From the standpoint of many an Awadh peasant in the 1920s, we would suggest, there was a Gandhi different from the one we know and promise of Swaraj also different from the one that we do not so much know as assume.”

Shahid Amin gives us an idea about the ‘Mahatma’ that percolated into the region before Gandhi’s visit by examining Gorakhpur district of Eastern U.P. during the winter and spring of 1921. In his work *Event, Metaphor, Memory, Chauri Chaura 1922–1992*, he tried to analyze peasant politics and Gandhian nationalism.

---

82 Ibid., p.188
Gandhi visited the Gorakhpur district on February 8, 1921 and he did not stay there for any length of time to lead or influence a political movement of the peasantry. “Gandhi, the person, was in this particular locality for less than a day, but the ‘Mahatma’ as an idea was thought out and reworked in popular imagination in subsequent months.”

It was during the Champaran Satyagraha of 1917 the unofficial canonization of Gandhi began in North India. There started spreading so many rumours about the powers of Gandhi. And people believed that Gandhi came to release peasants form the planters and there was no need to obey the planters any more. This belief gave them a moral strength to question the highest authorities.

Shahid Amin criticized the nationalist attitude towards the ordinary people or ‘Sadharan Janta’. In his view “To behold the Mahatma in person and become his devotees was the only role assigned to them, while it was for the urban intelligentsia and fulltime Congress activists to convert this groundswell of popular feeling into an organized movement. Thus it would appear that, even in the relationship between the peasant
devotee and their Mahatma, there was room for political mediation by the economically better-off and socially more powerful of his followers.\textsuperscript{85}

Amin did not want to give too much importance to Gandhi’s charisma which moved people. According to him giving too much importance to Gandhi’s charisma is as if we are denying the fact that how the people modified it according to their imagination. “To talk about the charisma of Gandhi should not be to limit oneself to analyzing the outward attributes of this charisma but, more importantly, to track its career in popular imagination and thereby to grant a certain dignity to the popular mind.”\textsuperscript{86} He says that popular singers and their audiences do not passively accept even the folklores. They change it or modify it into such a fashion as to match their own specific style. But for an outsider it looks like a distortion or misunderstanding.

According to him similar thing had happened in the case of the stories regarding the works of Gandhi. The people of Gorakhpur made several stories about the powers of Gandhi according to their own imagination which was based on whatever they heard about the work of

\textsuperscript{85} Shahid Amin, ‘Waiting for the Mahatma’, in Robin Jeffrey edited India Rebellion to Republic Selected Writings 1857-1990, Sterling Publisher Private Limited, New Delhi, 1990, p. 86

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., p.86-87
Gandhi in other parts of the country. Once they heard the news of Gandhi’s forthcoming visit to Gorakhpur the rumours started spreading in a rigorous speed. The local press also played their part in spreading the news.

The rumours about Gandhi reveals, “What people thought of the Mahatma were projections of existing patterns of popular belief about the ‘worship of worthies’ in rural North India.”\(^8^7\) The peasant perception of Gandhian ideas and Swaraj is very much discernible from the rumours which spread during this time. “Indeed their ideas about Gandhi’s ‘orders’ and ‘powers’ were often at variance with those of the local Congress – Khilafat leadership and clashed with the basic tenets of Gandhism itself. The violence at Chauri Chaura was rooted in this paradox.”\(^8^8\)

After violence took place at Chauri Chaura Gandhi and Congress leadership tried to disavow themselves from the incident. Amin criticized Gandhi and Congress leaders for not contextualizing the riot within any kind of political activity. What they did was that “they sought to delimit ‘true’ Congress politics by distancing the organization at Gorakhpur from the acts of their Chauri Chaura volunteers weeks before they turned into

\(^{8^7}\) *Ibid.*, p. 93
\(^{8^8}\) Shahid Amin, ‘Gandhi …’ , p. 55
so-called criminals. To consider the rioters as anti-Gandhian is not correct. Chauri Chaura incident “was an act of nationalist indiscipline caused by the absence of proper Congress leadership.” According to him to consider the rioters as criminal or hooligans is totally misleading. They committed violence because of their wrong belief that Gandhi’s Swaraj had already come in to existence. He accuses Gandhi and local leaders for creating an atmosphere where such beliefs held sway. But he failed in explaining why Gandhi, a person who believed so much in truth, let the people to fabricate stories about his powers and why he never tried to stop them? Or whether we can consider it as a tactics of a very clever politician? While constructing social history, Amin failed to find out the political aspects of the movement and its implications upon the ongoing national movement.

Like Shahid Amin, Sumit Sarkar is also trying to analyze the part played by the rumours. He suggests three moments in the emergence of a charismatic leader like Gandhi. According to him, the rumours fall into three main categories. First, there is his acceptance as an avatar, or a being

89 Shahid Amin, Event..., p.110
90 Ibid., p. 50
with extra ordinary power. Second, he is seen to confer immunity to his followers. And third, there is a call for total transformation of the world.  

Sumit Sarkar feels "that religious dimension is vital for an understanding of at least four crucial features of popular movements in the early Gandhian era: the nature and significance of rumour, the ethical norms and ritual obligations imposed by the emerging cult of Gandhi, the mood of renunciation and sacrifice evoked by the Mahatma, and the persistence of faith in him despite repeated instances of hopes deferred or frustrated" and religious dimension can perhaps help us "to understand why despite so many 'betrayals' Gandhi could retain so much more authority among the peasant masses than was ever enjoyed by his radical Left critics."

According to Sumit Sarkar, it was because of his religious appeal that Gandhi got so much support from the masses which his left counterparts failed in getting. And from this it appears that it was because of lack of religious appeal that the leftists didn’t get much support from the masses. And from his arguments, it seems that Gandhi was correct in

---

92 Ibid., p. 309
93 Ibid., p. 316
making a religious appeal. Even though he is trying to limit the role of Gandhi as a politician from his arguments it feels that Gandhi was an efficient politician who knows how to make an appeal to the illiterate masses. Religion played a very important role in the life of Indian especially in the life of illiterate rural masses and in order to array them against the foreign domination Gandhi touched the religious sentiments of these masses.

But he praised Gandhi’s tactics and knack in making a political move in understanding the feeling of the people. “What we have to understand are the deeper factors underlying the new popular mood of August 1942, which Gandhi certainly sensed and reflected incomparably better than the Communists with their theoretically not unjustifiable people’s war line.”

According to Sumit Sarkar, the basic Gandhian style of leading a movement was, “…drawing-in the masses, while at the same time keeping mass activity strictly pegged down to certain forms, pre-determined by the leader, and above all to the methods of non-violence.”

---

95 Ibid., p.179
Like Marxist scholar he gave importance to economic factors which led to the rise of mass movements. In Champaran and Kheda Gandhi entered only in later stage. He says, "There is ample evidence in both cases of discontent and protest long before the coming of the Mahatma."\(^96\) According to him at Kheda "...collective refusals to pay the revenue had become increasingly common well before the entry of Gandhi."\(^97\) He also points out the post world war inflation and the rising prices which affected almost all sections of Indian population. And the elite politicians successfully utilized this discontent.\(^98\) According to him the economic factors rallied people behind mahatma rather than the image and the teachings of Gandhi.

Compared to other Subalternist historians Sumit Sarkar is keeping a somewhat balanced view. He did not give undue importance to spontaneous nature of the movement. "The peasants still needed to be represented by a saviour from above – a crucial limitation which is perhaps at times underestimated by some recent scholars who, reacting against elite historiography, tend to somewhat romanticize the

---
\(^{96}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 156
\(^{97}\) \textit{Ibid.}, P. 156
\(^{98}\) Sumit Sarkar, "The Conditions ...", pp. 286-287
spontaneous revolutionary potential of the rural masses." This view is completely against the view of Gyan Pandey who believes that peasant movements originated independently without any support of the outside leader.

Subalternist historians have contributed immensely to the re-writing of Indian history. They give importance to the writing of social history. They mostly deal with the peasant revolt and peasant movements. For them, rumours are a means of mobilization. They claim that existing historical works totally ignored the rural population or the subalterns. Their effort to write people’s history is a positive move. But most of them are as much biased as the nationalist historians in dealing with the subject. Nationalist historians overemphasized the role of the leaders in the movement, on the other hand Subalternist historians overemphasized the role of the masses in the movement. From their writings it seems that they are interested in denying the influence of Gandhi on the vast classes of Indian poor. Their view is acceptable only if they gave due importance to the influence of Gandhi and also to the role played by the masses. Otherwise it may form a partial history of the Indian Freedom Movement.

99 Sumit Sarkar, Modern ..., p. 182
SECTION D: OTHER WORKS

Judith Brown’s *Gandhi’s Rise to Power – Indian Politics 1915-1922*, is an effort to trace Gandhi’s emergence as a leader during the period, 1915-22. Her attempt is to see the changes that were brought about by him and his “role in politics and to see what forces of change he was either creating or exploiting.”

Brown says that Gandhi during his political career in South Africa “rarely delegated responsibility for the organization and preferred to rely on his own influence and actions.” According to her, one of the reasons for Gandhi’s refusal to link the Champaran struggle with conventional politics was “If he threw his lot with a particular political group he would be sucked into the vortex of political alliances, and his independence would vanish.” She holds that it was the charismatic leadership of Gandhi which appealed in almost messianic terms to those at the very bottom of society.” In Kaira Gandhi worked on two main lines “external publicity and internal consolidation” and a “tightly knit band

---

101 Ibid., p. 8
102 Ibid., p. 74
103 Ibid., p. 81
104 Ibid., p. 101
of associates” formed the spearhead of his movement.¹⁰⁵ In both Champaran and Kaira “Gandhi took up an issue which was comprehensible and important to peasant cultivators, basing his campaign of support in the villages, while articulating rural discontent through the better and educated urban groups, who had some overt political awareness and public expertise. His strength lay in being the mediator between these groups.”¹⁰⁶

On the issue of Rowlatt Bills Gandhi’s ‘subcontractors’ failed him because Satyagraha threatened their basic local interests. By mid 1919 he had no reliable group of subcontractors. Hence he involved in an alliance with the Muslims.¹⁰⁷ The observance of ‘Khilafat Day’ shows “the extent to which Gandhi had begun to create and tap a network of organization and loyalty by his espousal of a Muslim cause…”¹⁰⁸

Gandhi depended much on his ‘subcontractors’ for the success of the movements he organized. Thus Gujarat and Bihar where Gandhi had “built up a local reputation and a network of sub-contractors, swung powerfully into all-India politics for the first time solidly in support of

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 104
¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 106
¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 190
¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 199
him” during the Non-cooperation Movement.109 Gandhi’s dependence on the ‘subcontractors’ was considered as weakness for Gandhi and Congress, because they entered the movement to “improve their position in their local power structure.”110 Judith Brown describes three types of ‘sub-contractors’ upon whom Gandhi depended. At the top were the western educated elite. Below them were the men educated either in the vernacular or in English, small town lawyers, traders, village priests etc. According to Brown this second tier of sub-contractors are extremely important as it was “on their reaction Gandhi’s power stood or fell.” Beneath them were the real ‘masses’ of India, the illiterate, low-paid workers and the unemployed of town and countryside. From this ‘lower class people’ Gandhi in fact elicited no truly political response.111 Her work denied the role of the masses whom “the Mahatma activated, and whose participation was too significant to be ignored.”112

Judith Brown’s Gandhi and Civil disobedience movement: The Mahatma in Indian politics 1928 – 34 traces Gandhi’s career from the Calcutta Congress session in the last days of 1928, when he was refashioned as a potential all India leader, to the Bombay congress

109 Ibid., p. 258
110 Ibid., p. 327
111 Ibid., pp. 343-345
112 I.D. Gaur, op. cit., p.119
October 1934, when again Gandhi withdraw from active politics. The primary aim of the book was to chart “Gandhi’s personal political career in one of its most remarkable phase.”\textsuperscript{113} This is its main drawback. In the words of Christopher Baker the work is a “Political biography rather than a political history arranged around a biography.”\textsuperscript{114}

Judith Brown’s study of “Gandhi’s role as civil disobedience leader in the 1930’s investigates a particular example of the phenomenon of continental political leadership.”\textsuperscript{115} It was during the phase from 1928 – 34 “occurred the creation of his new continental leadership position, the exercise of that leadership role, and its disintegration as the context changed and Gandhi could no longer perform the functions which had been his passport to prominence. It shows that Gandhi’s leadership position was no static phenomenon but one which altered over time as the context changed and his peculiar ambition and aptitudes meshed with and served the interests of other people and groups.”\textsuperscript{116}

By the end of 1930 the campaign had been crushed. In order “to sustain his all India leadership position, Gandhi had to play the role of

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{115} Judith Brown, \textit{Gandhi...}, p. xvi
\textsuperscript{116} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. xvi – xvii
\end{flushleft}
negotiator. He had to translate the gains of agitation into a negotiating position and secure a peace which would satisfy the diverse aspirations of the groups which had participated in civil disobedience for reasons only partially connected with his own political intentions.\textsuperscript{117}

Gandhi’s Irwin Pact probably marked the peak of Gandhi’s political influence and prestige in India.\textsuperscript{118} But by the end of 1934 Gandhi recognized that “he could no longer act as continental leader in the role of civil disobedience ‘expert’.\textsuperscript{119}

Judith Brown considers Gandhi as a politician who could “rarely attract support directly” and due to this he depended on “the support of key intermediaries who brought their clients, associates and followers to his political campaigns”.\textsuperscript{120}

The study is based on all available primary sources on the topic both in Delhi and London and details every minute aspect of the period it deals with. The approach is largely similar to that of her first book.

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., p. 152
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., p. 191
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., p. 387
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., p. 385
In both the works Judith Brown took two important periods in the political career of Mahatma Gandhi and tried to analyze the factors that made possible Gandhi's emergence as a 'Continental leader' and his dependence on the 'Sub – contractors' for his leadership. Even though it was well referenced and detailed work of these periods it is in adequate. She uncritically subscribed to the elite – based analysis of history developed by the Cambridge historians. Gandhi was projected as a leader who always depended on the 'sub-contractors', 'key intermediaries' or 'interest groups' for his success. In the whole narration the Indian National Movement became a movement of these intermediaries and this belittles Gandhi's leadership qualities.

_Gandhism: An Analysis_, written by P. Spratt was the first psycho analytical study on Gandhi, written from a point of view of qualified Marxism. In his book, Spratt tried to give an account of Gandhi’s mental development from his childhood days to fully developed Mahatma.

Spratt argues that Gandhi was abnormally sensual during his childhood in comparison with other children.\(^\text{121}\) By the end of his stay in England, he became clear in his mind that he was a reformer.\(^\text{122}\)

---

\(^\text{121}\) P. Spratt, _Gandhism: An Analysis_, Huxley Press, Madras,1939, p. 11

\(^\text{122}\) Ibid., p. 17
experiences that he had had in his home town, after coming back from England, changed the direction of his life. It marked a phase of rapid development in his life.\textsuperscript{123} Gandhi entered on a career of public service in South Africa but still regarded his political work only a part of his public activity. \textsuperscript{124} The change that took place in Gandhi's life from the age of 28\textsuperscript{th} onwards transformed him from a successful westernized barrister to something like a mediaeval ascetic.\textsuperscript{125}

Spratt holds that his case seems to conform to the Freudian pattern. Gandhi's thrift, his interest in sanitation, and other peculiarities, can be accounted for in the orthodox way. "His relation with his father suggests a hidden conflict. His sudden emancipation from his youthful inhibitions occurred soon after the death of his mother. His independence, his refusal ever to be in opposition or to another's leadership are characteristic results of this conflict."\textsuperscript{126}

According to him "enthusiastic psychoanalysts might see sadism at the root of his whole policy: the rigorous regime to which he subjects the inmates of his Ashram, his ultimate aim – the maximum simplification of

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., pp. 18-19
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., pp. 26-27
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., p. 88
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., pp. 91-92
life, and his method of Satyagraha – suffering and sacrifice as the universal panacea.”

According to Spratt Gandhi’s experiences in England had probably had the effect of increasing his admiration for “what can be called the bourgeois ideal of character and conduct. Spratt argues that “Nearly all that is needed for a typical modern feudal bourgeois dictatorship can be found in Mr. Gandhi’s ideas.” Gandhi’s non-violence, with the rest of his propaganda, is primarily that of the bourgeois asserting himself against mediaevalism.

Gandhi, in 1916, said that he was not a socialist, in 1925 he gave expression to a guarded approval of socialism and after 1934 when socialism became popular in India he began to call himself a socialist. Spratt attributes this change of attitude not to vulgar opportunism but to Gandhi’s “sensitiveness to feelings and thought of the community.” According to him, Gandhi followed a policy of conciliation and repression towards socialism.

127 Ibid., p. 98
128 Ibid., pp. 19-20
129 Ibid., p. 516
130 Ibid., p. 164
131 Ibid., p. 112
132 Ibid., p. 482
Erik H. Erikson’s book, *Gandhi’s Truth – On The Origins Of Militant Non violence* in his own words, “describes a Westerner’s and a Psycho analyst’s search for the historical presence of Mahatma Gandhi and for the meaning of what is called Truth.” He intended the subtitle “militant non-violence to provide a substitute clear English term for Gandhi’s word “Satyagraha”.

The book attempts a detailed psycho analytical study of Gandhi from his early childhood to middle age when he got involved in the Ahmedabad mill strike in 1918. It is a sophisticated exploration of the psychological importance of Gandhi’s non-violence and the study has no precedent whatever in writings on psycho analysis.

The study is based on Erikson’s belief that “What was described by him (Gandhi) and by some biographers as a mere episode in his life – and in Indian history was, in fact, an event of vital importance in his advent as a national leader and as the originator of militant non-violence.” To Erikson the “strike (the Ahmedabad mill strike) and fast represented a

---

136 Erik H. Erikson, *op. cit.*, P. 10
demonstrable crisis in the middle age of great man”.\textsuperscript{137} Erikson feels that Gandhi’s \textit{Autobiography} plays down the Ahmedabad episode.\textsuperscript{138} But we know that Gandhi’s interest in the past only is so far as it held any importance to the present and future. It is important to note here that his trade union activities were confined only to Ahmedabad and he never extended it to other parts of India.

According to Erikson, “from his childhood in Rajkot to his maturity in Indian politics, he (Gandhi) would never “play” unless he was in a position of such moral dominance that he could convince himself and others that the power game of his mediator ship was “for their own good.” And (not unimportantly) is often turned out to be just that.”\textsuperscript{139}

Erikson explains why Gandhi tried to become “more maternal than the most motherly of mothers” as “neither Moniya, nor Mohan nor the Mahatma could ever face the “natural superiority of women.”\textsuperscript{140} He tries to find the base for the development of Gandhi’s attitude towards the depressed classes in his childhood days. Thus, when Gandhi appointed himself his father’s nurse, “there was a drive in it which later would

\textsuperscript{137} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 47  
\textsuperscript{138} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 257  
\textsuperscript{139} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 109  
\textsuperscript{140} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 111
suffice for the care of all India as well as of Untouchables and lepers, of mankind as well as of an ashram.”

To Erikson Gandhi was an “inveterate ritualizer.” Thus it seems that “the political meaning of Gandhi’s identification with his mother: the maternal side of Bapu (“the father”, as he was later called) attracted particular types of followers and inspired particular trends in the masses: almost as though he had provided in his own person a new matrix, had become India herself. But this could not come to friction until he integrated equally well his father’s stubborn integrity and Bania pragmatism.”

Erikson concludes his work with the words: “when I began this book, I did not expect to rediscover psychoanalysis in terms of truth, self-suffering and non-violence. But now that I have done so, I see better what I hope the reader has come to see with me, namely, that I felt attracted to the Ahmedabad Event not only because I had learned to know the scene and not only because it was time for me to write about the responsibilities

---

141 Ibid., p. 111
142 Ibid., p. 157
of middle age, but also because I sensed an affinity between Gandhi’s truth and the insights of modern psychology.”

The history of the origins of Gandhi’s truth and nonviolence can be supplemented by the insights of psycho analysis. Erikson took an insignificant ‘Event’ – the Ahmedabad episode – for the work and totally disregarded other movements - Champaran, Rowlatt Satyagraha, and Non-cooperation movement. Only an analysis of these movements can throw light on the emergence of Gandhi as a national leader. The work says nothing about Gandhi as a nationalist political leader.

Bhikhu Parekh in his work Colonialism, Tradition and Reforms: An Analysis of Gandhi’s Political Discourse tried to examine Gandhi’s critical dialogue with tradition, his style of reform, his critique of and campaign against unacceptable beliefs and practices, and the manner in which he negotiated his way around and was sometimes defeated by its structural constraints. Parekh analysis how Gandhi saw himself as a yugapurusha led his people from a yuga of darkness and bondage into one of truth and freedom. Gandhi who knew how to tap and mobilize the

143 Ibid., pp. 439 - 440
145 Ibid., p. 11
regenerative resources of the tradition, “reduced tradition to a resource, located its essence in its general values which commanded respect but left room for critical evaluation, and gave every individual the freedom to draw upon insights of other traditions.\textsuperscript{146}

Parekh shows that how Gandhi while remaining rooted in his own tradition reinterpreted in the light of the insights derived from other traditions. Gandhi found the Hindu concept of Ahimsa “negative and passive and reinterpreted it in the light of the Christian concept of Caritas.” And as Caritas was too emotive and led to other worldly attachments. Gandhi “redefined it in the light of the Hindu concept of anasakti.” The double conversion, “Christianization of a Hindu category after suitable Hinduising its Christian components yielded the novel concept of an active and positive but detached an none motive love.”\textsuperscript{147}

Bhikhu Parekh holds that Gandhi had an extremely difficult task while reforming and reinterpreting the tradition as “he had to defend the integrity of the tradition against supercilious British criticism” and also “the tradition had to be pieced together and patiently reconstructed in a manner that took account of the rationalist challenge.”\textsuperscript{148} Gandhi had to

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., p. 23
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., p. 21
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., p. 32
adjust his theory of non-violence “to the inescapable constraints of political life and mass action.”\textsuperscript{149}

Terrorists also reinterpreted the Hindu tradition in order to secure support and mobilize the Hindu masses. They derived their theory of violence from the \textit{Gita} in particular and \textit{Mahabharata} in general.\textsuperscript{150} Gandhi was deeply worried about the growing influence of the terrorists. He argued that not violence but non-violence was the central message of the \textit{Gita} and the \textit{Gita} justified violence only under specific conditions. Parekh concludes the dialogue between Gandhi and terrorists by saying that “Gandhi was right and terrorists were wrong.”\textsuperscript{151}

Parekh argues that Gandhi took the word \textit{Shakti} and suitably redefined it. Throughout his political life, Gandhi kept exploring ways of ‘releasing’, ‘conserving’ and ‘mobilizing’ popular energy and ‘converting’ and ‘transforming’ it into power or \textit{Shakti}.\textsuperscript{152} Gandhi was a man of action and was desperately anxious to acquire the enormous power to secure the desired political and social objectives. Gandhi embarked upon the sexual experiments in order to acquire the kind of moral and

\textsuperscript{149} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 136  
\textsuperscript{150} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 148-154  
\textsuperscript{151} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 171  
\textsuperscript{152} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 173
spiritual power. His experiments were a good example of how he both remained within and radically departed from the Hindu religious tradition. In the words of Parekh “Gandhi re-enacted the great Krishna-gopi legend in his life and gave it a wholly new meaning and significance.\textsuperscript{154}

Parekh holds that Gandhi radically redefined the four categories of traditional occupations underlying the ancient varna system that the latter made no sense.\textsuperscript{155} He considers that Gandhi failed to tackle untouchability since he defended the caste system.\textsuperscript{156} According to him Gandhi’s campaign permanently discredited untouchability but it could not end the high-caste economic and political domination.\textsuperscript{157}

The work is a critical analysis of Gandhi’s role as a social reformer. While presenting the subject, he eulogizes Gandhi and thereby undermined the activities of other figures and movements. This we can see especially in his chapter dealing with the Terrorists and Untouchability. He totally disregards terrorists and leaders like Ambedkar.

\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., p. 201
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., p. 206
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., p. 229
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., p. 242
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., p. 246
Concluding Remarks:

The brief historiographic critique enable us to draw some conclusions. It would be clear that the different perspectives are inadequate as we believe that they do not highlight the crucial element that set apart Gandhi-mass mobilization. The writings of the nationalist historians give only an idea about the history of the national movement and the leadership provided by the elite. Their study failed to provide an analysis of Gandhian strategy in which masses played an important role. Though the Marxist historians gave importance to the role of the masses they largely confined their arguments to the characterization of Gandhi as the representative of the bourgeoisie. In their works also a detailed analysis of the Gandhian strategy based on mass mobilization is missing. The Subaltern historians on the other hand explained the success of Gandhian leadership in terms of ‘rumours’ in which Gandhi had no part to play. As such it also lacks an analysis of political techniques that Gandhi used to mobilize masses.

To Judith Brown, Gandhi was a leader who depended on the ‘sub-contractors’ for his success. She didn’t even consider analyzing Gandhi as a political strategist and his success in mobilizing the largely inert and politically inactive masses.
Insights derived from the works of Psychoanalysts are useful in analyzing the background in which Gandhi developed his political techniques. The works of Cultural historians like Bhikhu Parekh largely confines their study in analyzing the role of tradition in moulding Gandhi’s thoughts and actions. Such works also do not detail mass mobilization.

Our intention is to place Gandhi in the historical context of the Indian National Movement in which he played an important part from 1920 onwards. Firstly we try to analyze the context in which Gandhi developed his political strategy. Therefore, the next chapter will be an analysis of the nature of the colonial state under which Gandhi developed his strategy of mass mobilization.