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**Mahatma Gandhi: Politics as an Art of Healing  
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**Abstract**

This article examines the multifaceted dimensions of Gandhi's politics as an art of healing. It explores how his philosophy and practices aimed to mend societal wounds, restore moral and economic vitality, and establish a foundation for a just and harmonious society. By analysing Gandhi's contributions to social justice, political empowerment, and ecological sustainability, the article underscores the enduring relevance of his ideas in addressing contemporary challenges.

As the world contends with crises ranging from political polarization, violence, and social inequity to environmental degradation and public health emergencies, Gandhi's life and legacy offer valuable insights. His unwavering commitment to truth, nonviolence, and the welfare of all provides a moral compass for envisioning politics as a vehicle for healing and unity rather than division and domination.

**1. Introduction**

Mahatma Gandhi is widely celebrated as the leader who guided India to independence from colonial rule.<sup>1</sup> Yet, an equally profound but less acknowledged aspect of his legacy lies in his role as a healer—addressing societal wounds, cultural alienation, economic exploitation, and spiritual despair. For Gandhi, politics was neither a quest for power nor dominance but an ethical and transformative practice grounded in the well-being of society. His political

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<sup>1</sup> For details of his iconic life, see Nanda, B.R. *Gandhi: A Biography*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1981.

philosophy transcended conventional governance and activism, emphasizing grassroots engagement and alignment with community needs and aspirations. Gandhi believed authentic politics must alleviate suffering, restore broken relationships, and foster harmony at every level of existence. Known as the Father of the Nation in India, Gandhi, in framing politics as an art of healing, could perhaps also be aptly described as the “Doctor of the Nation”.<sup>2</sup>

In an era rife with colonial exploitation, racial discrimination, and societal divisions, Gandhi’s approach was radical yet deeply humane. Grounded in compassion, it sought not only to challenge political and economic injustices but also to heal the moral and psychological wounds of both the oppressed and the oppressors.

Gandhi, a towering figure in modern history, symbolizes the transformative power of truth and nonviolence. At the core of his political vision was the principle of *ahimsa* (nonviolence),<sup>3</sup> which he upheld as both a spiritual discipline in the pursuit of *satya* (truth) and a pragmatic strategy. For Gandhi, nonviolence was not passive submission but an active force capable of confronting entrenched injustices.<sup>4</sup> This principle, intertwined with *Satyagraha* (truth force or soul force),<sup>5</sup> exemplified a method of civil resistance emphasizing the moral authority of truth over coercion. Together, these concepts underpinned Gandhi’s conviction that meaningful political change required healing the human spirit alongside structural reform.

Gandhi’s politics of healing extended far beyond resistance to colonial rule.<sup>6</sup> It sought to address deeper societal fractures, such as caste discrimination, poverty, and communal strife, by advocating for harmony and unity among diverse communities. His campaigns, such as the Champaran Satyagraha and the Salt March, exemplify this integrated focus on resistance, reconciliation, and regeneration. Gandhi’s leadership during the tumultuous Partition of India, particularly his efforts to quell communal violence through fasting and personal intervention, underscores his unwavering commitment to healing a fractured society, often at great personal cost.<sup>7</sup>

This article delves into Gandhi’s politics as an art of healing by examining its philosophical foundations, practical applications, and lasting legacy. It demonstrates how his methods served as antidotes to the systemic violence of colonialism and societal discord, advancing a vision of politics as a moral endeavour rooted in empathy and justice. Through an analysis of

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<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.facebook.com/inymamh/videos/470435644004458>, my keynote lecture for Inygra MH’s and Gramrajya Trust- Webinar on “Gandhi ji and Health”, 152<sup>nd</sup> Gandhi Jayanti celebration.

<sup>3</sup> For a recent disquisition on his ‘Politics of Peace’, see Parel, Anthony J. *Pax Gandhiana: The Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi*. Oxford University Press, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> See the major study by Dalton, Dennis. *Mahatma Gandhi: Nonviolent Power in Action*. Columbia University Press, New York, 1993.

<sup>5</sup> In coining the word *Satyagraha* (to replace the commonly used, but inappropriate term ‘passive resistance’), in 1906/7, Gandhi was drawing on traditional Indian principles such as *Satya* and *Ahimsa* which he claimed were as ‘old as the hills’ – complemented by concepts such as *Tapas* (will power) and *Yagna* (self-sacrifice or selfless service). *Satyagraha*, in short, signified a love-force or soul-force, enacted in nonviolent resistance or civil-disobedience that, for Gandhi, represented the only acceptable instrument for gaining India’s independence; he estimated it more efficient than resistance by violence; see Gandhi, M.K.: *Satyagraha: Non-Violent Resistance*. Ahmedabad 1951 (reprinted).

<sup>6</sup> Parekh, Bhikhu. *Gandhi's Political Philosophy: Principles and Practical Examples*. Macmillan Press, London, 1989, contains a thorough analysis of Gandhi’s political theories and their practical implementations in social and political contexts.

<sup>7</sup> For the historical context, see Brown, Judith M. *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*. Yale University Press, New Haven, 1991.

key moments in Gandhi's life and writings, the article illuminates his unique approach to politics—not as a pursuit of power but as a means of mending the fabric of human relationships.

## 2. Healing Colonial Trauma: Gandhi in South Africa and Beyond

Before his prominence in India, Gandhi's political awakening began in South Africa, where he spent 21 formative years (1893–1914). In this setting, he encountered institutionalized racial discrimination—a dehumanizing system that stripped individuals of dignity and denied them basic rights.

A pivotal moment occurred shortly after his arrival in May 1893, when Gandhi was ejected from a first-class train compartment at Pietermaritzburg station, despite holding a valid ticket. He later described this experience of profound humiliation as the genesis of his active nonviolence. Reflecting on this injustice, Gandhi wrote, “The humiliation was the beginning of my active nonviolence”.<sup>8</sup> This incident catalysed his broader commitment to resisting systemic injustice with moral courage rather than by resorting to violence.

Notably, Gandhi likened racial prejudice to a “disease” afflicting the minds of Europeans, distorting their perception of non-white peoples. This linguistic framing was revolutionary, as it subverted the colonial narrative, which often depicted Indian migrants as carriers of physical disease due to their impoverished and unsanitary conditions. By reversing the discourse, Gandhi highlighted the moral and psychological deficiencies of the colonizers rather than the supposed inferiority of the colonized.

Describing prejudice as a moral ailment that dehumanized both victims and perpetrators, Gandhi sought to address (with the aim of curing) this “disease” through nonviolent resistance and moral persuasion. Rather than resorting to antagonism, he aimed to demonstrate the dignity and humanity of those subjected to racial prejudice. His campaigns for the rights of Indian migrants in South Africa<sup>9</sup>—demanding recognition of their marriages, access to education, legal protection, and better living conditions—were acts of societal healing designed to foster equality and mutual respect.

Gandhi's campaigns in South Africa targeted discriminatory laws, such as the Asiatic Registration Act of 1906, which required Indians to carry registration passes. His resistance campaigns, rooted in *Satyagraha*, transcended political protest, becoming acts of moral healing. Gandhi emphasized the need to win over the hearts of oppressors, arguing that

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<sup>8</sup> *Satyagraha in South Africa*, Chapter 2, first published in 1928, republished in *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 2, translated from Gujarati by Valji Govindji Desai, General Editor Shriman Narayan, Navajivan Trust, 1968.

<sup>9</sup> Here is a brief explanation of the economic-political & socio-historical context: Indians arrived in South Africa in three waves: Between 1860 and 1911, about 150,000 South and North Indian (speaking mainly Tamil, Telugu, Bhojpuri and Awadhi) immigrants were brought to Natal as indentured labourers. From the mid-1870s entrepreneurs from Gujarat, the Konkan and Uttar Pradesh began arriving, to be followed in the 1890s by a third educated elite group (including lawyers, teachers, civil servants and accountants). Towards the end of the century, the extremely exploitative relationship between the white colonists (comprising about 10%-15% of the total population, numbering about 5 million) and the native African population (constituted of several different ethnic groups, representing at least 80% of the population) was being unsettled by enterprising Indians which inflamed racial hostility in particular towards Asiatics (amounting to about 5% of the total South African population); for more details, cf. William Kelleher Storey: *Guns, Race and Power in Colonial South Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008; and Zoe Laidlaw and Alan Lester, ed.: *Indigenous Communities and Settler Colonialism*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

prejudice stemmed from ignorance and fear. “Prejudice,” he wrote, “is a product of narrow minds. Its remedy lies in opening hearts to the suffering of others.” (*Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* [CWMG], vol. 8, p. 94).

### *Hind Swaraj: A Therapeutic Manifesto*

In *Hind Swaraj* (1909), heralded as his political manifesto,<sup>10</sup> Gandhi critiqued not only colonial arrogance but also the larger construct of modern civilization, which he labelled a “disease”.<sup>11</sup> He asserted that Indians shared responsibility for their subjugation, famously declaring, “The English have not taken India; we have given it to them.”<sup>12</sup> Gandhi’s analysis positioned Indians as active agents in their own subjugation, urging them to recognize their complicity and strive for *swaraj* through self-accountability. By framing modernity as a force that perpetuated inequality, oppression, and societal unrest, Gandhi sought to dismantle its hegemonic allure, especially among India’s westernized elite, and to cure them of their cultural mesmerisation.<sup>13</sup>

More broadly, Gandhi’s efforts in South Africa reflected a dual commitment: resisting oppression and fostering reconciliation. By uniting Indians of various religions, ethnicities, castes, and classes under *Satyagraha*, he worked to heal internal divisions within the community while challenging external discrimination. This inclusive approach became a cornerstone of his later campaigns in India, where he sought to address the deeper wounds inflicted by British colonialism.

### **3. Gandhi’s Healing Philosophy in Action**

When Gandhi returned to India in 1915, he brought with him the lessons learned in South Africa. His critique of the colonial mind-set and modernity extended to India’s struggle for independence, where he sought to dismantle the psychological chains of inferiority, deep-rooted fear, and dependence that colonialism had imposed. For Gandhi, freedom was not merely the absence of foreign rule but the restoration of India’s moral and cultural vitality. His campaigns exemplified a politics of healing that aimed to transform the prevalent economic and political structures, thereby revitalising societal structures, while uplifting the human spirit.

Mahatma Gandhi’s political campaigns were not just means to achieve independence but also instruments for restoring dignity and addressing societal wounds. His leadership reflected a profound understanding of the human condition, emphasizing empathy, moral clarity, and resilience. For Gandhi, political struggles were opportunities to nurture the collective soul,

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<sup>10</sup> Gandhi, M.K. *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*. Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1938 (first published in 1910); version referred to here is the new edition by Indus Source Books, Mumbai, 2019 (with an introductory essay by Gita Dharampal, pp. xxv-xlv, providing an overview of the historical genesis of the text, as well as an evaluation of its continued relevance for contemporary issues.

<sup>11</sup> A designation that was also used by Edward Carpenter in his monograph *Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure*. 1889

<sup>12</sup> *Hind Swaraj*, op. cit., Chapter VII, p. 28.

<sup>13</sup> Since Gandhi’s aim was to subvert the legitimacy of the colonial enterprise, *Hind Swaraj* epitomizes ‘in rhetorical flourish’ his stringent criticism of the Indian railways, law courts, modern medicine and English education, hitherto considered as the four pillars of Britain’s ‘civilising mission’ in India; for a discursive presentation, see Gita Dharampal, “Reading Hind Swaraj in Today’s Context”, Introduction to new edition of *Hind Swaraj* (1910/2019), op. cit. pp. xiv-lxv.

addressing material injustices and the psychological scars left by oppression, as exemplified by the following three paradigmatic examples:

One of the earliest and most illustrative examples of Gandhi's healing politics was the Champaran Satyagraha of 1917.<sup>14</sup> Responding to the plight of indigo farmers in Bihar, who were forced into exploitative arrangements by British planters, Gandhi organized a nonviolent campaign to confront systemic injustice. By living among the farmers, listening to their grievances, and mobilizing them in peaceful resistance, Gandhi empowered a marginalized community to reclaim their agency. Reflecting on the campaign, he expressed clearly in concise language, "The object of satyagraha is to bring about a settlement which satisfies all parties" (*CWMG*, vol. 15, p. 145). This belief in reconciliation over adversarial victory underscores his consistent commitment to viable solutions that 'healed' both the oppressed and their oppressors.

Famously, the Salt March of 1930 further demonstrated Gandhi's art of healing through nationwide nonviolent resistance. Challenging the British salt tax monopoly, which symbolized colonial economic control, Gandhi led a 240-mile march to the Arabian Sea to produce salt. This seemingly simple act carried profound symbolic weight, representing both a protest against injustice and a call for self-reliance. On the eve of the march, Gandhi proclaimed, "We must be the change we wish to see in the world" (*Young India*, March 5, 1930).<sup>15</sup> By involving ordinary citizens in nonviolent resistance, he fostered a collective healing process that transcended class and caste divides. Yet, not only was Gandhi able, thereby, to arouse a whole nation, resolutely, albeit nonviolently, defying the armed might of the British Empire; but through his uncanny talent for attracting the international media, the global public became a spectator as state repressive violence was borne courageously. His iconic statement "I want world sympathy in this battle of right against might"<sup>16</sup>, in functioning as an ideational 'surgical operation', so-to-speak, served to delegitimise the British Raj and precipitate the 'decline of the Empire'.<sup>17</sup>

A third crucial campaign, the Quit India Movement of 1942, while more confrontational, reflected Gandhi's healing philosophy. As he called for the British to leave India, Gandhi emphasized unity and nonviolence. Addressing the nation, he declared, "A nonviolent soldier of freedom will covet nothing for himself; he fights only for the freedom of his country" (*Harijan*, July 26, 1942). His focus on collective liberation rather than personal gain sought to heal the divisions and self-interest that often undermined movements for political autonomy and justice.

Through these and many other campaigns (including grassroots' initiatives), Gandhi demonstrated that effective political action required not only strategic skill but also the ability to inspire trust, foster dialogue, and prioritize the well-being of all stakeholders. His insistence on nonviolence and truth ensured that the pursuit of justice would not perpetuate cycles of violence or deepen existing wounds.

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<sup>14</sup> For a recent evaluation of the Champaran Satyagraha, see Verma, Archana. "Satyagraha and the public sphere", in: *Asian Journal of Multidimensional Research*, 2021, vol.10, issue 11, pp. 690-702.

<sup>15</sup> This is the famous paraphrase of the comments made by Gandhi, before leaving his Sabarmati Ashram, as reproduced in an article of *Young India*, 5<sup>th</sup> March, 1930. For a recent analysis of the Salt March, see Thomas Weber. "Gandhian Nonviolence and the Salt March", *Social Alternatives* 2002, vol. 21/2, pp. 46-51.

<sup>16</sup> *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*, vol.43, p.180; a handwritten note, dated 5<sup>th</sup> April 1930, penned at Dandi, on Arabian Sea coast.

<sup>17</sup> As heralded prominently in the following article: "The decline of empire: Gandhi, salt, and freedom." *The Economist*. Dec. 31, 1999.

#### 4. Nonviolence as a Tool of Healing

It needs to be underlined, once again, that for Gandhi, nonviolence (*ahimsa*) was more than a moral ideal—it was an active, transformative force capable of addressing systemic injustices. He believed that violence, whether physical or structural, inflicted deep wounds, corroding the moral fabric of society. By contrast, nonviolence functioned as a healing balm, fostering reconciliation, bridging divisions, and enabling constructive dialogue. This philosophy underpinned Gandhi’s campaigns, where nonviolence became a means to resist oppression and mend the adversarial relationships it created.

Gandhi described nonviolence as the “greatest force at the disposal of mankind”, comparing it to “love in its purest form” (*Young India*, November 5, 1931). Far from passive submission, nonviolence demanded courage, discipline, and a profound commitment to truth. His concept of *Satyagraha*—often translated as “truth force”, as mentioned before—emphasized the spiritual power of nonviolence. Gandhi argued that truth and love were inseparable and that only through nonviolent action could lasting justice be achieved. “Ahimsa is the means; Truth is the end,” he poignantly declared (*Harijan*, August 11, 1940).

The healing power of nonviolence lay in its ability to engage the conscience of the oppressor. By refraining from retaliation, Gandhi aimed to reveal the humanity of both the oppressed and the oppressors, breaking cycles of hatred and retribution. This approach was evident during the Kheda Satyagraha of 1918,<sup>18</sup> where Gandhi supported farmers resisting oppressive taxation during a famine. Rather than inciting anger, he encouraged the farmers to maintain their dignity while steadfastly refusing to pay taxes. This strategy not only secured concessions from the British government but also fostered solidarity among the farmers, restoring their sense of agency and self-worth.

Gandhi’s application of nonviolence also extended to communal and interreligious tensions. During the escalating Hindu-Muslim violence of the 1920s and 1940s, Gandhi tirelessly worked to heal divides.<sup>19</sup> Emphasizing forgiveness and mutual understanding, he often placed himself at personal risk to mediate peace. In a speech during the Noakhali riots of 1946, he declared – with clairvoyant insight, “If we are to reach real peace in the world, we shall have to begin with the children” (*CWMG*, vol. 90, p. 267). By highlighting the importance of education and moral development, as part and parcel of his ‘political healing’, Gandhi underscored the need to cultivate a culture of nonviolence for future generations.

So, in a nutshell, unlike conventional political strategies that sought to overpower opponents, Gandhi’s approach aimed to transform adversaries into allies. By addressing the root causes of conflict—inequality, mistrust, and alienation—his philosophy sought not only to resolve disputes but also to heal the societal fractures underlying them. His insistence on engaging with opponents as moral equals, even in the face of colonial authorities or communal factions, exemplified his belief in the redemptive potential of nonviolence.

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<sup>18</sup> For more details, see Hardiman, David. *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat: Kheda District, 1917-1934*. Oxford University Press, 1981.

<sup>19</sup> For insights into Gandhi’s endeavour to bring about Hindu-Muslim unity, see Dharampal, Gita, “Mahatma Gandhi and Islam: A Relationship defined by Affinity, Fascination, Crisis and Rupture”, *Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. XVIII/1, 2021, pp. 8-28.

## 5. Gandhi's Legacy of Social Reforms and Political Vision

As mentioned previously, Gandhi's politics as an art of healing extended beyond the struggle against colonialism to address the deeply rooted social divisions within Indian society. His efforts to eradicate untouchability, empower women, regenerate local communities, and propose a vision for decentralized governance formed the cornerstone of his vision for a liberated and just society. In each of these areas, Gandhi emphasized the need for moral transformation rooted in spiritual values and community-based action.

### *The Removal of Untouchability*

Gandhi regarded untouchability as one of the gravest moral failures of Indian society, describing it as “the greatest blot on Hinduism” (CWMG, vol. 18, p. 348). For him, the practice was not merely a social injustice but a spiritual affront to the dignity of every human being, and, as a “cancerous growth”, needed to be removed from India's body politic. Hence, he championed the rights of Dalits (whom he called *Harijans*, or “children/people of God”) and worked tirelessly to integrate them into the broader social and religious community.<sup>20</sup>

One of Gandhi's first major efforts in this area came in 1917 when he led a campaign to secure Dalits' rights to access public wells in Sabarmati. Beyond symbolic gestures, he urged his followers to treat Dalits with the respect accorded to others, emphasizing: “The removal of untouchability is the test of true democracy” (*Harijan*, March 13, 1937). Gandhi believed that healing Indian society required dismantling the entrenched caste system, and he saw the eradication of untouchability as a crucial step toward achieving social harmony and justice.

### *Empowerment of Women*

Gandhi also viewed the emancipation of women as essential to the moral and social renewal of Indian society. Rejecting patriarchal norms that relegated women to subordinate roles, he encouraged their active participation in the freedom struggle, for he regarded women as the moral and spiritual anchors of society, whose strength lay in their infinite capacity for love, sacrifice, and nonviolence.

In his own emphatic words, Gandhi stated many a time: “There is no occasion for women to consider themselves subordinate or inferior to men. [...] Woman, I hold, is the personification of self-sacrifice, but unfortunately today she does not realize what tremendous advantage she has over man.”<sup>21</sup> He believed that empowering women through education, economic independence, and social reform would enable them to contribute meaningfully to building a just and compassionate society.

Thanks to Gandhi's initiatives, women actively engaged in nationalist activities, such as spinning khadi, picketing liquor shops, and leading protests. These actions not only advanced the freedom movement but also instilled a sense of agency and self-respect among women.

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<sup>20</sup> For a recent differentiated analysis of the shared values/approach of both Gandhi & Ambedkar, Biswas, Sujay. “Gandhi and Ambedkar against Untouchability: A Reappraisal”, *South Asia Research*, 2021, vol. 41/2.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted from an article by Vibhuti Patel, “Gandhiji and the Empowerment of Women”, <https://www.mkgandhi.org/articles/womenempowerment.htm>

Gandhi also supported widow remarriage and emphasized the crucial importance of education for girls, laying the groundwork for greater gender equality.<sup>22</sup>

### *Community Regeneration and the Constructive Programme*

At the heart of Gandhi's vision for a healed India was the regeneration of local communities through self-reliance and moral upliftment. Outlined in his *Constructive Programme*,<sup>23</sup> this vision sought to revitalize rural India by emphasizing decentralized governance, equitable social structures, and economic self-sufficiency.

To clarify the importance of the Constructive Programme, he drew attention to the following ideational and practical concurrence: "It is a mistake to make a distinction between the constructive and the political programmes. In my opinion, political work also is constructive work. [...] In reality, they are two branches of Satyagraha, and hence are akin. One cannot be complete without the other."<sup>24</sup> And at another juncture, he acclaimed: "The constructive programme may otherwise and more fittingly be called the construction of Poorna Swaraj or complete Independence by truthful and non-violent means".<sup>25</sup>

Indeed, Gandhi believed that true independence required empowering villages to manage their own affairs. "The soul of India lives in its villages," he asserted (*Young India*, November 22, 1928). He championed village industries like hand-spinning, viewing them as symbols of self-reliance and economic justice. The *Constructive Programme* emphasized the elimination of untouchability, appropriate education, health reform, and community unity, aiming to bridge the divide between rural and urban India.<sup>26</sup>

### *Governance as Oceanic Circles*

As has become evident, Gandhi's vision of governance rejected the centralized, hierarchical 'pyramid' model in favour of decentralized "oceanic circles." He envisioned local communities as the foundation of governance, with power and decision-making flowing outward in harmonious cooperation:

"In this structure, composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever widening, never ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual...." (*Harijan*, August 27, 1946).

This model reflected his belief in non-coercive authority, where decisions were guided by moral responsibility and collective well-being rather than domination. More specifically, he maintained: "True democracy cannot be worked by twenty men sitting at the centre. It has to be worked from below by the people of every village." (*Harijan*, January 18, 1948).

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<sup>22</sup> For an historical-political assessment of Gandhi's contribution, see Kishwar, Madhu P., "Gandhi on Women", *Economic and Political Weekly* 20, no. 41 (1985): 1753–758 & reprinted in: *Race & Class* XXVIII (1986), pp. 43–61.

<sup>23</sup> *Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Its Place*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad 1941 [subsequent editions in 1944, 1945, 1948].

<sup>24</sup> Speech at Gandhi Seva Sangh Meeting, Savli, 3-3-1936, [From Hindi], *Gandhi Seva Sangh ke Dwitiya Adhiveshan (Savli) ka Vivaran*, pp. 50 ff.

<sup>25</sup> *Constructive Programme*, op. cit., p. 5 (quoted from the revised 1945 edition).

<sup>26</sup> For more details, cf. Dharampal, Gita. *Redressing the Balance: Mahatma Gandhi's Experiments with Constructing an Alternative Society* (2022), Final Report for ICSR Major Research Project, 38 pp.



In short, Gandhi's concept of grassroots' governance sought to foster an egalitarian and healthy political environment, rooted in the values of justice, truth, and nonviolence.

## 6. Gandhi's Lasting Legacy: Relevance to Contemporary Issues

Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy, rooted in nonviolence, truth, and social justice, continues to resonate in addressing contemporary global challenges. Although his campaigns and reforms were historically situated within colonial India, the core principles of his philosophy offer enduring solutions to modern issues, including mitigating cataclysmic violence, environmental crises, economic inequality, and social polarization.

### *Nonviolence in a Violent World*

In an era characterized by conflicts ranging from wars to civil unrest, Gandhi's advocacy of nonviolence remains profoundly relevant. His principle of *ahimsa* (nonviolence) challenges the normalization of violence in various forms—whether through armed conflict, systemic racism, or institutionalized brutality. Nonviolence, as Gandhi demonstrated, is not passive submission (as already mentioned), but an active engagement that seeks justice while preserving moral integrity.

Gandhi's concept of *Satyagraha*—nonviolent resistance founded on truth and love—has inspired movements worldwide, such as Martin Luther King Jr.'s Civil Rights Movement and Nelson Mandela's anti-apartheid struggle. Gandhi's belief that “an eye for an eye makes the whole world blind”<sup>27</sup> urges societies to seek reconciliation and healing rather than revenge. In today's world, his approach offers a pathway to address the root causes of violence, such as inequality and prejudice, fostering peace through understanding and compassion.<sup>28</sup>

### *Addressing Environmental Crises with Simplicity and Self-Reliance*

One of the most pressing challenges today is environmental degradation, including climate change and resource depletion. Gandhi's philosophy of 'simple living and high thinking' offers a counter-narrative to the consumerism and exploitation that have driven ecological destruction. His emphasis on *swadeshi* (self-reliance) promoted local economies and sustainable practices, reducing dependence on large-scale industrial systems that harm the environment.

Gandhi's vision of harmony with nature resonates strongly in modern times, urging individuals and communities to adopt lifestyles that respect the planet's limits. His call to use

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<sup>27</sup> This adage is often attributed to Mahatma Gandhi, but lacks direct evidence of being his exact words. However, Gandhi expressed a similar sentiment in his writings and speeches that emphasizes nonviolence and forgiveness.

<sup>28</sup> As an illustration, authors who have been influenced by Gandhi's 'revolutionary nonviolence' are Thurman, Howard. *Revolutionary Nonviolence*. Beacon Press, Boston, 1969 (which discusses the spiritual and ethical dimensions of nonviolence as a means to heal societal fractures and promote justice) and Lederach, John Paul. *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005 (which highlights the integration of moral and spiritual values into practices of peacebuilding and reconciliation.)

only what is necessary provides a moral framework for addressing over-consumption and fostering sustainable development.<sup>29</sup>

### *Economic Justice: A Response to Inequality*

Gandhi's critique of economic systems that prioritize profit over people remains acutely relevant in today's era of widening wealth gaps. He advocated for an economic model grounded in moral values and social equity, emphasizing the upliftment of the marginalized.<sup>30</sup> Gandhi's idea of trusteeship<sup>31</sup>—a principle where wealth is held in trust for the benefit of society—offers an ethical alternative to unchecked capitalism.

“Poverty is the worst form of violence,” Gandhi wrote (*Harijan*, October 17, 1937). This sentiment underscores his belief that addressing economic inequality is central to creating a just society, more so today than ever before. His call for localized, self-reliant economies challenges exploitative global systems and presents a vision for more equitable resource distribution in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### *Social Healing and Identity Politics*

In a world increasingly polarized along lines of race, religion, caste, and ethnicity, Gandhi's emphasis on unity and mutual respect is both timely and transformative. During his lifetime, he worked to heal communal divisions, particularly between Hindus and Muslims, by fostering a spirit of tolerance and shared humanity.

His belief in universal brotherhood offers a counterpoint to the divisive identity politics of today. In any case, Gandhi's assertion that “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others” (*CWMG*, vol. 30, p. 152) emphasizes the importance of selflessness in bridging societal divides and nurturing inclusive communities.<sup>32</sup>

### *Gandhi's Vision for Global Cooperation*

Gandhi's philosophy extended beyond India's borders, advocating for a world governed by moral values rather than political power. His vision of decentralized governance, symbolized by “oceanic circles”, provides a framework for addressing global issues, from pandemics to climate change, through collective responsibility and cooperation.

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<sup>29</sup> This Gandhian vision is implicit in an emerging alternative public discourse; for a small cross-section, see contributions in *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research*; <https://blog.pearlacademy.com/how-the-gandhian-philosophy-aligns-with-sustainability-today/>; and Sahoo, Braja Kishore, “Reinventing Gandhian Ideas in Mitigating the Environmental Crisis”, *Odisha Review*, October 2015, pp. 35-40.

<sup>30</sup> For a contemporary Gandhian ‘acolyte’, see El-Sayed, Abdul. *Healing Politics: A Doctor's Journey into the Heart of Our Political Epidemic*. Abrams Press, New York, 2020, which comprises a memoir and call-to-action exploring how empathy can address systemic inequities in public health and politics.

<sup>31</sup> For a concise overview of the topic from a contemporary perspective, along with a literature review, see Chakrabarty, Bidyut, “Universal Benefit: Gandhi's doctrine of Trusteeship: A review article”, *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 49/2, 2015, pp. 572 – 608.

<sup>32</sup> A paradigmatic example of Gandhi's praxis of ‘political healing’ inspiring recent scholarship is Ure, Michael. *Politics of Compassion*. Routledge, London, 2014, who examines the role of compassion in ethical governance and its transformative potential in resolving political and social conflicts.

As nations grapple with interconnected crises, Gandhi's emphasis on moral leadership and nonviolence offers a blueprint for fostering international harmony. His ideals challenge the dominance of power-driven politics, urging a shift toward empathy, equity, and shared stewardship.

## 7. Conclusion<sup>33</sup>

### *Key Takeaways*

1. **Healing as central to Politics:** Gandhi viewed politics not as a quest for power but as a means to heal societal wounds, restore harmony, and nurture the moral and spiritual fabric of communities.
2. **Nonviolence and Truth as Tools of Change:** His principles of *ahimsa* (nonviolence) and *Satyagraha* (truth force) underscore the transformative power of love, compassion, and moral courage in addressing injustice.
3. **Empowering the Marginalized:** Gandhi's campaigns demonstrated how marginalized communities could reclaim agency and dignity through collective action rooted in ethical values.
4. **Local Solutions for Global Challenges:** By emphasizing self-reliance, decentralized governance, and sustainable practices, Gandhi proposed models of resilience that resonate in today's interconnected and crisis-laden world.
5. **Unity in Diversity:** His relentless efforts to heal religious and caste divisions illustrate the importance of empathy, mutual respect, and dialogue in fostering social harmony.

In a world increasingly fractured by violence, inequality, and ecological degradation, Gandhi's politics as an art of healing offers a profound moral compass. It reminds us that enduring change begins within each individual, as they strive to embody the principles of truth, nonviolence, and empathy in their daily lives. By fostering understanding, bridging divides, and addressing injustices with love and courage, we can create ripples of transformation in our communities and beyond.

Readers are encouraged to practise Gandhi's philosophy by:

- Cultivating compassion and understanding in personal relationships.
- Advocating justice and equality in their local contexts.
- Embracing simplicity and sustainability to address environmental concerns.
- Working to mend divisions within their communities through dialogue and mutual respect.

As Gandhi once said, "You may never know what results come of your actions, but if you do nothing, there will be no result" (*CWVG*, vol. 13, p. 241). Let us take inspiration from his life and legacy to become active participants in healing our world—one step, one act of kindness, and one courageous stand at a time.

## 8. Selected Bibliographical References:

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<sup>33</sup> This concluding section succinctly highlights the main points and emphasizes the actionable dimension of Gandhi's "Politics as an Art of Healing".

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