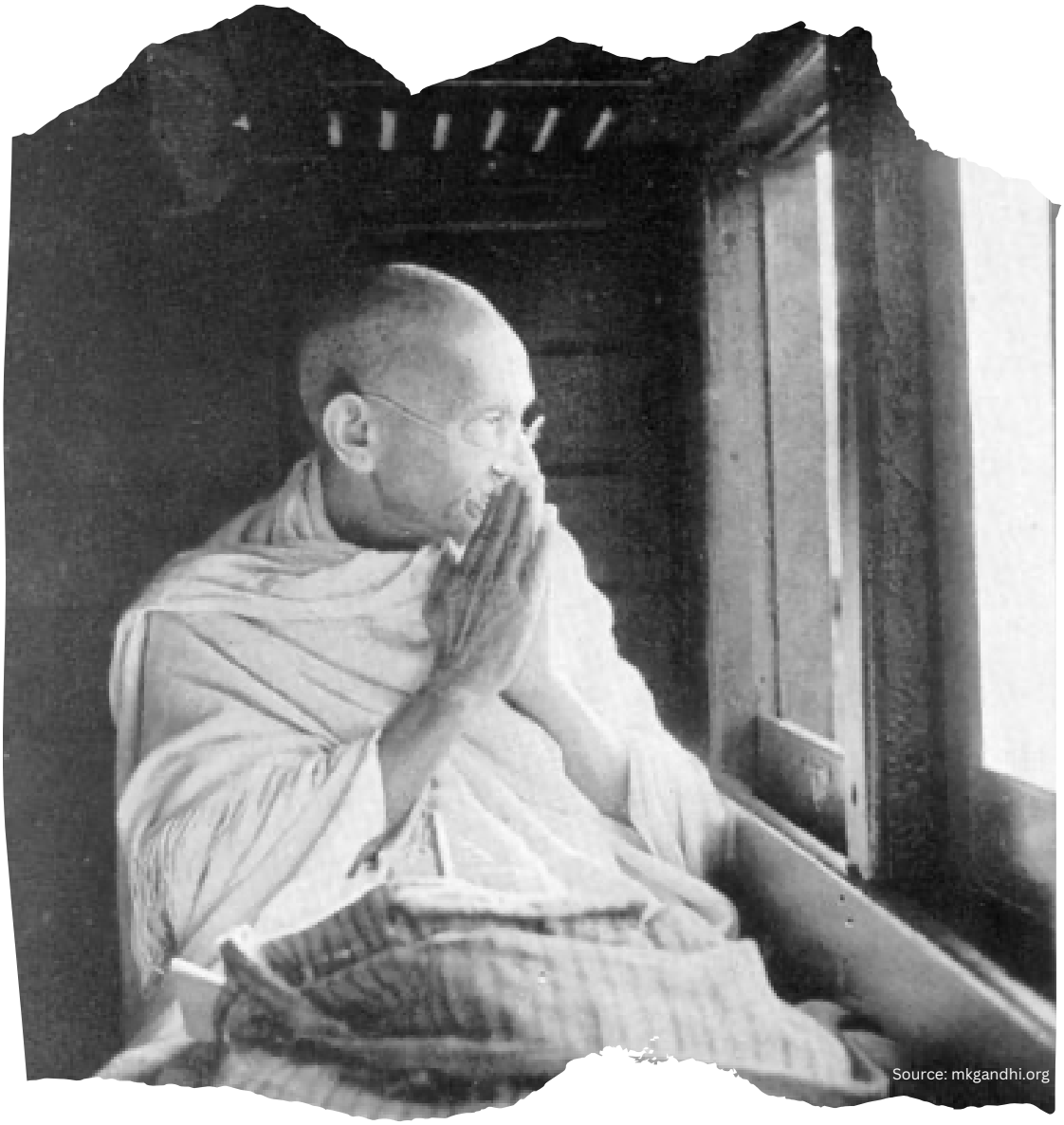
OCTOBER, 2025 | ISSUE 09

THE NEHRU CENTRE NEWSLETTER



"Truth is by nature self-evident. As soon as you remove the cobwebs of ignorance that surround it, it shines clear."

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

We're excited to share with you the ninth issue of our newsletter! This issue is dedicated to exploring Mahatma Gandhi, his philosophy, politics, and methods. Through our pieces, we revisit Gandhi not as a distant icon but as a thinker and strategist whose moral vision continues to challenge our political and social realities. From his experiments with truth and non-violence to his critique of modernity and education, this issue examines how his ideas remain deeply relevant in our fractured times.

A special thanks to our guest columnists for their contributions this month and to the TNC team members who have brought everything together to make this issue what it is.

As always, we hope these pieces inspire you to reflect, discuss, and critically engage with the world around you. Your feedback is always appreciated, and we look forward to sharing more with you in the upcoming issues.

We look forward to your continued engagement!

Best,
Amartya Mishra
Lead Editor, The Nehru Centre

TNC
Researching Truth, Reimagining Democracy

Disclaimer: While we strive for accuracy and fairness, the views and opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the individual contributors and do not necessarily reflect those of The Nehru Centre, its editorial team, or its staff members. The Nehru Centre assumes no responsibility for any inaccuracies, misinterpretations, or any consequences arising from the content published herein. Contributors are solely responsible for ensuring that their work does not infringe on any copyright, defamation, or other legal provisions.

CALL FOR GUEST WRITERS

The Nehru Centre (TNC) is accepting submissions from guest writers on a rolling basis for our upcoming newsletters. Please read our editorial guidelines carefully before sending us your submission. We invite submissions in the following formats in up to 900 words:

1. Opinion pieces – Arguments backed by facts and figures (not rants)
2. Socio-political, Historical, Law & policy Analysis– National or international scope
3. News reports – Curated or original reporting based on primary field research

How to Submit ?

1. Email your submissions (doc) to thenehrucentre.india@gmail.com with a short author bio & your social media handles.
2. Mention the title of your piece in the subject line and specify if it is time-sensitive.
3. For the write-ups, please use English (UK), Times New Roman, 12pt, and line spacing 1.15.
4. If selected, the editor will review your work and request edits, if necessary.
5. You will be informed about the expected publishing date once the newsletter goes live.
6. Your article will be shared on TNC's multiple social media platforms and you will be tagged (depending on social media accounts provided by you).
7. We retain the final say over headlines, publishing dates, and images used.

AI & Plagiarism Policy

We value original thought and authentic writing. While AI tools can assist in proofreading, structuring, or shortening content, all AI usage must be disclosed to the editor. AI-generated content without human oversight will not be accepted.

Terms & Conditions

1. Indicate if your article is exclusive to The Nehru Centre or has been published elsewhere. We prioritize original content and typically do not republish blog posts.
2. Copyright for material that is published exclusively is held jointly by The Nehru Centre, New Delhi and the authors.
3. If others request to republish your article, you must seek TNC's informed consent before granting permission.
4. Once an article is published, it cannot be removed/ taken down except in legal, copyright, or safety-related cases.
5. With the exception of trans writers, we do not allow any writer to change their name or write under a pseudonym for The Nehru Centre to ensure complete transparency and to avoid any legal hassles going forward. However, writers wishing to publish personal narratives can choose to write anonymously for us (editorial records will still require full author details).

TRIBUTE

GANDHI: THE MAN WHO MOVED A NATION

By Mansi Singh

Mahatma Gandhi is often remembered as the saintly figure of non-violence, the “Father of the Nation” whose image now adorns currency notes and official ceremonies. Yet this constant reverence has also made him seem distant. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was not merely a saint or a preacher of non-violence, he was a sharp political mind who could read the pulse of the people and transform moral conviction into political action. His leadership was rooted not in power, but in persuasion. He showed how courage, truth and simplicity could become instruments of mass politics.

Gandhi’s journey as a political leader began after his return to India in 1915. In South Africa, he had already experimented with satyagraha, resistance through truth, but it was in India that he found the stage and the audience to turn these experiments into a national movement. The Rowlatt Satyagraha of 1919 may not have achieved its political goals, but it changed the very meaning of protest. Gandhi’s call for a hartal resonated deeply with ordinary Indians who had never before been part of politics. It gave them a way to act, to resist, and to feel that their voice mattered.

What set Gandhi apart from earlier Congress leaders was his closeness to ordinary life. His choice of dress, the simple loincloth and shawl, was not just about personal simplicity, it was a way to identify with India’s poor. The spinning wheel became his enduring symbol of dignity and self-reliance.

Part of Gandhi’s strength lay in his manner of speaking. He avoided complex words or fiery rhetoric, choosing instead simple language interwoven with stories, prayers and moral

lessons. British officials often wondered how he managed to connect so profoundly with the masses. His authority came not from office or title but from character, from his honesty and his ability to live by what he preached.

His use of fasting revealed how political his spirituality could be. For many, fasting was a private act of devotion, but for Gandhi it was a moral appeal to others’ conscience. When Hindu–Muslim riots broke out in 1924, he undertook a 21-day fast. His suffering was not an accusation but a reminder that India’s freedom would mean little without unity. During the brutal communal riots in Bengal in 1946, he walked from village to village, urging Hindus and Muslims to trust one another again. And in January 1948, when Delhi was torn apart by Partition violence, Gandhi stopped the bloodshed not through weapons or force but by refusing to eat. People from different communities came together, made peace, and

pledged mutual protection. Such was the depth of his moral influence that one man's silence could calm an entire city.

Gandhi's presence often created a sense of safety and discipline. Riots subsided when he appeared, walking barefoot, speaking to communities, or undertaking a fast. He did not lead from above, he immersed himself among the people, becoming both guide and moral compass. He could turn crowds into moral communities, bound not by fear or coercion but by shared values.

He was also a man who engaged constantly with his critics. Revolutionaries thought him too moderate, caste reformers felt he was not radical enough, and communal groups accused him of bias. Historian Ramachandra Guha said that it is "very easy" to quote Gandhi out of context. He further said "Gandhi's idea of non-violent resistance against unjust authority, his refusal to define citizenship on the basis of faith, his convictions as an environmentalist who anticipated disastrous results from unbridled growth and consumerism, and his ability to be a patriot and internationalist at once were a few of the reasons why Gandhi still matters."

Gandhi stood apart from most political leaders because he never stopped learning and evolving. He was unafraid to admit when he was wrong. His views on caste, women and industry changed over time as he continually tested them. For him, politics and morality were not separate spheres, they were parts of the same truth.

His relationship with industrialist G. D. Birla reveals another facet of his character. Birla first met Gandhi in 1916 and was deeply struck by his sincerity and pursuit of truth. Despite their contrasting temperaments, Birla's pragmatic business mind and Gandhi's idealistic dissent, they developed a close relationship. Birla often acted as an informal intermediary between Gandhi and the British authorities, supporting his initiatives for more than three decades. He also served as the founding president of the Harijan Sevak Sangh.

Gandhi's understanding of wealth and ownership differed from that of the merchants who supported him. He did not oppose profit but believed that wealth was not private property, it was a trust to be used for the community's welfare. Though he sought to end capitalism and inequality, he also understood that a movement as vast and audacious as India's freedom struggle required the practical support of wealth and resources.

By 1947, India had achieved political freedom, but Gandhi himself felt no joy. When people congratulated him on his 78th birthday, he quietly asked, "Where did the congratulations come from? Would it not be more appropriate to say condolences?" For Gandhi, independence without unity and compassion was hollow.

Source: mkgandhi.org

On 30 January 1948, as he walked to his evening prayer meeting at Birla House in Delhi, Nathuram Godse, a fanatic, shot him. Gandhi died instantly at the age of 79, with “Hey Ram” on his lips. His funeral drew over a million mourners, and as his ashes were carried by train to Allahabad, thousands lined the tracks to pay tribute. For many, it felt as though not just a man but a moral guide had departed. In his iconic speech on 30 January 1948, Jawaharlal Nehru said “The light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere. I do not know what to tell you and how to say it. Our beloved leader, Bapu as we called him, the Father of the Nation, is no more.”

In the years since, Gandhi’s image has become both larger and shallower. His name is invoked by politicians who often fail to live by his ideals. Yet his ideas continue to speak to our times. One wonders if Tagore’s prophecy has come true: “The West,” Tagore wrote, “will accept Gandhi before the East. For the West has gone through the cycle of dependence on force and material things of life and has become disillusioned... The East has not gone through materialism and hence, hasn’t become disillusioned yet.”

In an era of misinformation, Gandhi’s insistence on truth, as the foundation of politics, seems radical. In a world driven by violence and polarisation, his practice of non-violence remains a powerful alternative. Amid consumerism and ecological crisis, his ideal of simplicity offers a path towards sustainability.

To remember Gandhi only as the Mahatma is to overlook the political genius of a man who could move a nation without arms, armies or wealth. Gandhi was not just a saintly figure but a strategist who mobilised millions through symbols and moral authority. His charisma, simplicity and courage made him the voice of the masses. Even after assassination, his ideas proved indestructible. Today, when politics often appears cynical and divisive, Gandhi reminds us that it can still be a moral enterprise, capable of inspiring collective action and building unity.

GUEST COLUMN | IDEAS

NON-VIOLENCE AS GANDHI'S PHILOSOPHY

By Sajeeta Iyer*

The twentieth century saw many revolutions, wars, and freedom struggles. Among the many leaders of this time, Mahatma Gandhi stands out as a unique figure. His idea of non-violence (ahimsa) was not just a method to gain freedom for India, but also a deep moral principle that could change how humans relate to one another. For Gandhi, non-violence was much more than avoiding physical fights; it was built on truth, love, and respect for every living being. Thinking about his philosophy helps us imagine a kinder and more peaceful world, especially when violence often looks like the easiest solution.

Gandhi did not invent the idea of non-violence. He drew it from India's old traditions. The Upanishads, Jainism, and Buddhism had long taught the value of ahimsa. But Gandhi gave this idea a new life by turning it into a powerful and practical tool for social and political change. For him, violence was not only about hitting or killing someone. Even harsh words, negative thoughts, or actions that hurt another person's dignity were forms of violence. Non-violence, on the other hand, started from within the mind and heart before showing in action. Gandhi even called it "the law of our species," meaning that humans have the ability to rise above animals by choosing love instead of hatred.

Gandhi always made it clear that non-violence was not the same as weakness or fear. It was not about being passive or doing nothing. In fact, he believed that if one had to choose between cowardice and violence, violence was the better option. But the highest and bravest choice, he said, was non-violence. This path required great courage and inner strength. A

Gandhi in Noakhali, November 11, 1946; Source: Britannica

follower of non-violence must be ready to suffer without hitting back, and to stop the cycle of hatred by refusing to copy the enemy's actions. Gandhi's life proved this. Whether he faced jail, physical attacks, or even death, he never gave up on his belief that non-violence could touch the conscience of the oppressor.

One of Gandhi's greatest achievements was showing that non-violence could work not only for individuals but also for entire societies. Before him, ahimsa was often seen as a personal or religious value, practiced by saints and monks. Gandhi turned it into a mass movement. Through events like the Salt March, the boycott of foreign goods, and countless peaceful protests, he showed how millions of ordinary people could fight injustice without violence. This was a revolutionary idea, and it inspired

leaders around the world, such as Martin Luther King Jr, Nelson Mandela, and César Chávez, who used non-violence to fight for justice in their own countries.

At the heart of Gandhi's thought was the link between truth (satya) and non-violence. He often said, "Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills." For him, truth was the ultimate goal, and non-violence was the only correct way to reach it. Violence, he believed, always twisted truth by creating fear, hatred, and lies. Non-violence, however, revealed truth by appealing to justice, reason, and compassion. This made his philosophy both a moral duty and a practical method for achieving freedom and justice.

Looking at today's world, we see many challenges —terrorism, wars, communal hatred, and environmental destruction. Many people say that Gandhi's non-violence is too idealistic, that it cannot work in a world where the powerful only respect force. Gandhi's answer would be that violence never brings lasting peace. Violence creates more violence, while non-violence plants the seeds of reconciliation and healing. History supports this. Wars may end, but they often leave behind bitterness and more conflicts. On the other hand, non-violent struggles, like the civil rights movement in the United States or the end of apartheid in South Africa, created deeper changes in society and proved Gandhi's philosophy right.

Another important part of Gandhi's philosophy was his respect for all life forms. His non-violence was not just about how humans treat each other but also about how we treat animals, plants, and nature. He practiced vegetarianism, lived simply, and promoted self-sufficient villages because he believed in living in harmony with the environment. In today's age of climate change and ecological crises, this part of Gandhi's teaching has become even more mean-ingful. Non-violence towards nature may be the key to saving humanity itself.

On a personal level, Gandhi's philosophy also challenges each of us. It is easy to condemn wars or terrorism, but much harder to see the small violences we practice in daily life—anger, hatred, harsh words, or prejudice. Gandhi's idea of non-violence asks us to show patience in conflict, kindness in speech, and forgiveness even towards those who hurt us. This requires constant self-discipline and self-purification. Though it is difficult, it is also freeing, because it helps us escape cycles of anger and revenge.

In conclusion, Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence is not something from the past. It is alive and relevant today. It gave strength to India's freedom struggle, inspired global movements for justice, and continues to guide individuals in their daily lives. Gandhi himself admitted that perfect non-violence may be impossible, but he believed we must keep moving towards it. Each step brings us closer to truth, peace, and justice. In a world still torn apart by conflicts and hatred, Gandhi's message shines like a beacon, reminding us that the greatest power lies not in violence but in compassion, patience, and the courage to open our heart.

** Ms. Sajeeta Iyer is the Princpal at Ryan International School, Gurugram*

GUEST COLUMN | LANGUAGE

LANGUAGE AND LEGACY: FROM MACAULAY'S MINUTE TO GANDHI'S VERNACULAR VISION

By Avish Patel*

The subject of language in India, whether to push further with English, Hindi, or a vernacular language has most probably been one of the longest-running cultural and political discussions in modern history. Discussions continue over language, and ultimately it comes down to a matter of the legacy of Thomas Babington Macaulay, who in 1835, in his Minute on Indian Education, rejected the intellectual worth of Indian literatures and positioned English at the centre of colonial education. This legislation established an order of languages, where English communicated power and prestige, while vernacular languages were erased. On the other hand, Mahatma Gandhi offered a vision of an education that was rooted in the vernacular or mother tongue, believing that language was at the heart of education and nationality. The dispute between Macaulay's Anglicist vision and Gandhi's vernacular vision reflects a larger dispute between colonial authority and native ascent. Understanding this conflict is critical to understanding India's current language dilemma, and the extent to which it is in the bind of cultural authenticity and global modernity.

Macaulay's Anglicist Vision

Macaulay's Minute was the pinnacle of colonial arrogance and utilitarian ethics. His statement regarding "a single shelf of a good European library" being worth "the whole native literature of India and Arabia" illustrates the arrogant mentality that informed British cultural policy. By promoting the spread of English education, Macaulay hoped to construct an intermediate elite who were "Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (Macaulay, 1835, Girl Child Report). By providing this route in English, it became the language of the ruling bureaucracy, law, and elite education, thus creating an elite-mass division of English speakers, which persists even today in Indian society.

English fostered access to knowledge and communication on the world stage, while positioning the vernacular as second class, denying it institutional prestige and associating it with those without or with only limited literacy. The superiority of English survived colonialism, encasing itself in privilege and opportunity in present-day India.

Mahatma Gandhi's Vernacular Vision

In opposition to Macaulay's elitist agenda, Gandhi advanced a philosophy rooted in Swaraj (self-rule) and Swadeshi (indigenous self-reliance). For him, English continued cultural and psychological domination even after political freedom. He was adamant that education through English disengaged Indian elites from the people, furthering internal divisions within society. Gandhi believed that "real education should be imparted through the vernacular" and imagined Hindustani, a blend of Hindi and Urdu, as a national language that would bind the nation together. His philosophy of languages was not just one of communication but of moral and cultural self-respect. Gandhi's emphasis on the vernacular aimed to restore dignity to local traditions and democratise education by engaging in the everyday language of the people. In doing so, he sought to reorient Indian modernity on indigenous rather than foreign foundations.

Critical Perspective and Contemporary Relevance

Gandhi's position generated support but was nevertheless also critiqued. Scholars including Sheldon Pollock, for example, believed that Gandhi's position was overly moralistic and, therefore, was oblivious to the many languages comprising India's linguistic diversity. The multilingual nature of the subcontinent meant that a national language based on a singular vernacular did not exist. Detractors also argued that Gandhi was dismissive of the possibility of English as a unifying language across regions. Historians such as Ramachandra Guha and Judith Brown asserted that Gandhi's idea of unification through Hindustani exhibited a practical aspect where regional languages were also significant. The legacies of Macaulay and Gandhi that endure today are a strong factor in determining the language policy in independent India. English acts as a neutral lingua franca in education and bureaucracy, vernaculars have a sovereign purpose in literature, culture, and everyday life. The struggle carries on between colonial legacies, at the same time, as aspirations for vernaculars to re-emerge in modern India's language policy, the struggles are evidenced by the debates surrounding the legitimacy of applying Hindi as a national language, regional independence movements, and the implications of continued English presence in an increasingly a globalised world.

Conclusion

India's language history bears witness to the continuing contestation between Macaulay's Anglicist policy and Gandhi's vernacular vision. Macaulay established English as the language of power and, in doing so, established an elite-mass divide that continues to have implications today affecting social mobility. While Nehru's nationalisation enabled the educated minority, Gandhi was inclined to reclaim dignity for vern-aculars and democratise education, basing national identity on cultural authenticity. Both these legacies are very much in current relevance. India, as of today, cannot emphasise one vision at the expense of another. It must embrace a multilingual philosophy that values vernacular languages as transmitters of culture while using English as a world language. Thus, India needs to process plurals of the present and colonial past to build a language policy that is future-oriented and inclusive.

References

Bughio, Abbas Ali. "Anglicist and Orientalist," n.d.

Brown, Judith M. *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.

Guha, Ramachandra. *India after Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy*. New Delhi: Picador, 2007.

Macaulay, Thomas Babington. *Minute on Indian Education*. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1835.

Pollock, Sheldon. *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.

Zelliot, Eleanor. "Gandhi and Ambedkar: A Study in Leadership." *Journal of Asian Studies* 33, no. 3 (1974): 561–575.

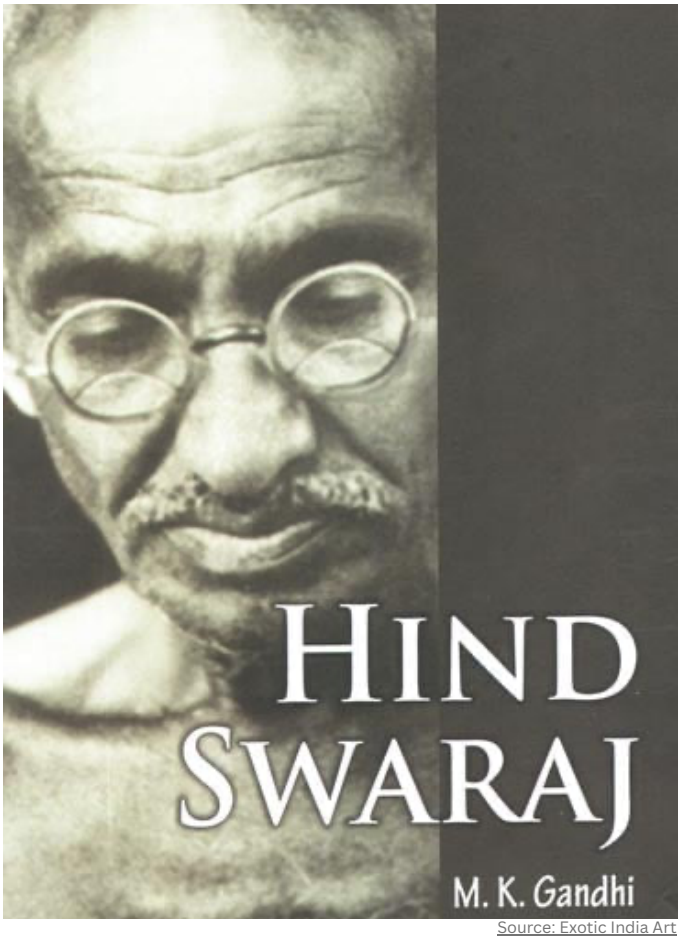
** Avish Patel has completed his M.A. History from Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University, Lucknow. His research interest include the social and subaltern history of modern India.*

GUEST COLUMN | BOOK REVIEW

A CLARION'S CALL FOR RESISTANCE: HIND SWARAJ AND GANDHIAN LEGACY

By Mauzzama Fatima*

In the history of anti-colonial struggles, Mahatma Gandhi's Hind Swaraj (1909) stands as one of the most audacious critiques of empire and modernity. Written on his return voyage from London to South Africa, first serialized in Indian Opinion and originally penned in Gujarati, the text was more than a political tract—it was a spiritual manifesto. It rejected the gospel of hate and violence, substituting it with the gospel of love and self-suffering. It replaced brute force with what Gandhi famously called soul force. If the twentieth century saw innumerable experiments in political freedom, Hind Swaraj offered the rare vision of freedom through self-control, truth, and non-violence.



Source: Exotic India Art

The Book as Resistance

At the helm of the Non-Cooperation Movement, when the government institutions, law courts, and schools were boycotted, books became instruments of resistance. Hind Swaraj circulated widely, despite frequent bans by colonial authorities. Its sale and distribution became an emblem of literary defiance—rejecting British governance and what Gandhi saw as the illusions of modern civilization. The text countered imperial authority and the violent nationalist alternatives gaining ground in India and abroad.

Written in response to advocates of violence, Hind Swaraj asserted that genuine self-rule could never emerge from hatred. For Gandhi, freedom demanded discipline, moral regeneration, and inner strength—strength defined not by muscle or arms but by fearlessness and fidelity to truth.

Gandhi's Critique of Civilisation

Gandhi's condemnation of "modern" civilisation is the most striking feature of Hind Swaraj. To him, it was not progress but enslavement—of man by machine, of spirit by greed. Railways, hospitals, and courts, often hailed as European achievements, were symbols of decay. Gandhi believed they weakened community bonds and encouraged dependence.

However, he was not entirely anti-technology. he wholeheartedly accepted tools that were a part of necessity; he was in thorough denial of overdependency in machinery that substituted human labour and sullied their minds and bodies. His fear was the erosion of dignity and self-reliance in the quagmire of mechanical convenience.

Nation, Religion, and Moral Sentiment

Gandhi's argument drew upon moral and religious traditions deeply rooted in Indian soil. He appealed not to abstract theories but to the scriptures and ethical traditions familiar to Indians and the British. He provocatively asked the rulers to consult their own Christian scriptures, suggesting that, in that light, Indian demands would no longer appear unwarranted but righteous.

At the same time, he urged Indians to rediscover fraternity among themselves. His call to love extended even to marginalized groups—Pindaris, Bhils, Thugs—rejecting the British claim to be India's savior from its "lawless" elements. For Gandhi, a true nation had to embrace all who lived on its soil.

Self-Rule as Self-Control

One of Gandhi's most memorable declarations was that India could not claim swaraj merely by expelling the English. Self-rule was not a transfer of power but the mastery of self. It meant governing one's desires, resisting temptations, and practicing restraint. Only a people capable of such discipline could exercise political independence. Thus, Hind Swaraj sought to transform the very meaning of freedom—from external authority to inner mastery.

Reception and Condemnation

Upon publication, Hind Swaraj was swiftly condemned. Critics called it impractical or dangerously idealistic, while colonial authorities branded it seditious and banned its circulation. Even many Indian nationalists found it unpalatable, preferring industrial modernisation or armed struggle. Nevertheless, its radical divergence is precisely what gave the text its enduring power.

Legacy of the Text

With hindsight, *Hind Swaraj* reads as the seed from which Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolent resistance would grow. The principles of ahimsa (non-violence), satyagraha (truth-force), and constructive self-reliance all find their first systematic articulation here. It is more than a political pamphlet; it is a civilisational critique of empire, modernity, and nationalism without ethics.

As a work of resistance, it reminded readers that strength lay not in hatred or machinery but in the courage to suffer, love, and stand firm in truth.

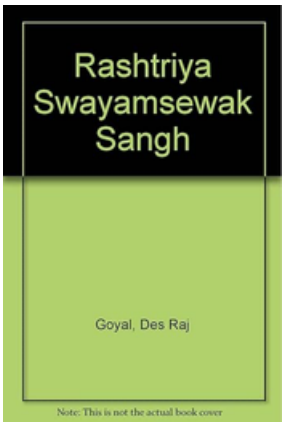
To reminisce about the ideas of Gandhi today is to confront the paradoxes he left behind—his radical simplicity in an age of industrial complexity, his insistence on restraint in a world intoxicated with power, his gospel of love amid structures of hate. *Hind Swaraj* stands tall as a profound document because it defies the linear logic of progress, yet it reveals freedom beyond domination.

Gandhi's true legacy lies not merely in attaining India's independence but in the enduring lesson of Hind Swaraj: that the highest swaraj is mastery of the self, and the most significant resistance is love.

** Mauzzama Fatima is a research scholar in the Department of History at Aligarh Muslim University. She focuses on 18th-century regional history of India, with a keen interest in the Indian independence movement.*

RELEVANT READINGS FOR OUR TIMES

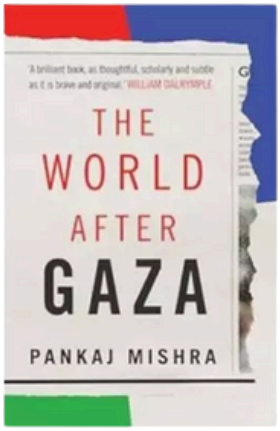
By Amartya Mishra



Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh

Author: Des Raj Goyal

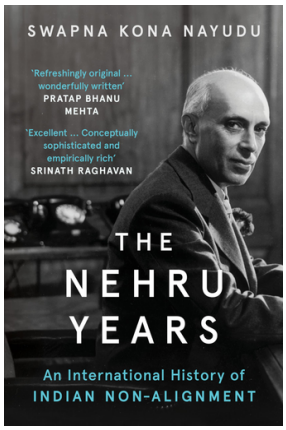
A seminal work on the organisation, its history and its workings. The book is a critical account of India's largest socio-political organisation, celebrating its centenary this year. Originally published in 1979, it is a difficult find today.



The World After Gaza

Author: Pankaj Mishra

Provocative and unputdownable, this book interlinks Western racial discrimination to anti-semitism that has resulted in a militant, and often polarising, stream of contemporary Zionism. Written by an Indian-born British author, it offers a distinctly Indian perspective on Gaza.



The Nehru Years

Author: Swapna Kona Nayudu

***A** deeply researched study of Jawaharlal Nehru's foreign policy from 1947-64, it argues that non-alignment was far more than a Cold War posture. It emerged from anti-colonial thought and moral politics, balancing power, mediating conflicts, and resisting bloc pressures—rather than mere neutrality.*

GET IN TOUCH

the_nehru_centre | The Nehru Centre India | thenehrucentre | thenehru_centre | thenehrucentre.india@gmail.com