

SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY  
PEER REVIEWEDTHE SOUL OF RESISTANCE: GANDHI'S HUMANISM AS A COUNTER-  
NARRATIVE TO MODERNITY

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**Introduction:**

Individual autonomy is threatened by the unrelenting march of modernity, which is marked by the environmental destruction caused by industry and the cultural erasure caused by imperialism. However, the humanism of Mohandas K. Gandhi demonstrates that the human spirit is stronger than machinery. Nearly 20 million people will be uprooted from their homes in 2025 due to flooding in South Asia, a stark reminder of the numerous challenges posed by modernity and the detrimental impact of neocolonial trade policies on economies in the Global South. According to Max Weber's warning (1905/2001, p. 123), the "*iron cage*" of rationalization traps individuals in bureaucratic misery. Beyond mere opposition, Gandhi's *ahimsa* (nonviolence) and *satyagraha* (soul-force) ethic seeks ethical self-mastery and communal harmony. There has been no research on Gandhi's humanism as a counter-modernity. Environmental thinkers like Vandana Shiva investigate the hubris of industrial capitalism, while postcolonial critics like Frantz Fanon investigate the mental effects of imperialism. Rather than a universal ethic, Gandhi's spiritual pragmatism has been interpreted by few as an anti-colonial approach (Fanon, 1961/2004; Shiva, 1997). Anthony J. Parel claims that Gandhi's Hind Swaraj calls for a "*civilization based on soul-force*" rather than the "*soulless machinery*" of modernity. According to Parel (1997), swaraj has the power to liberate individuals both politically and individually. This essay contends that the humanism espoused by Gandhi—*ahimsa*, *satyagraha*, and *sarvodaya* (universal uplift)—opposes the dehumanization brought about by modernity. It does this by advocating for genuine individuality and collective triumph in the face of social and environmental challenges. To establish Gandhi's humanism, the dissertation starts with his seminal writings, Hind Swaraj, and The Story of My Experiments with Truth. It then compares and contrasts this with Fanon's and Weber's modernist critiques of spirituality and alienation. The text continues by tying this ethic to contemporary concerns, highlighting its significance in resistance and environmental protection. In his writings from 1909 and 1997, Gandhi stated, "*True civilization is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty*" (p. 67). The impact of Gandhi's soul-centered humanism on international ethics and its capacity to restore humanity to society are explored in this paper.

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**The Philosophical Roots of Gandhi's Humanism:**

In its spirit-centered opposition and universal morality, Gandhi's humanism is a masterwork. A philosophy that opposes the mechanical alienation of modern life through the application of *satyagraha* (soul-force) and *ahimsa* (nonviolence), which stems from a synthesis of Indian spiritual traditions with Western moral critiques. The *Bhagavad Gita*, Gandhi's "*spiritual dictionary*" and "*infallible guide of conduct*," is central to his philosophy. In the midst of his incarceration in South Africa in 1908, he had a profound realization about *satyagraha* as selfless action when confronted with adversity: "*To me the Gita became an infallible guide of conduct.*" I couldn't tear myself away from the book... The concepts of "*aparigraha*" (without possessing) and "*samabhava*" (equanimity) prevented me from progressing. This *Gita* practice is hard but detached, just like *Krishna's nishkama karma*. Everything is one, which is in line with *Vedanta's Advaita* (non-dualism). I embrace Advaita. Every living thing, in my opinion, is similar to humans. "*If one man gains spirituality, the whole world gains with him*" (1924, Radhakrishnan & Rajagopalachari, 1955, p. 398). This quote is attributed to Gandhi. Humanism is enhanced by Jainism's profound empathy. "*Ahimsa does not simply mean not killing*," Gandhi said, transforming *ahimsa* from a monastic code of silence into a practical manifesto of nonviolence. *Ahimsa* kills out of anger or greed. "*Ahimsa is Gandhi's way of saying 'not doing that'*" (1926, Shugan, 2017, Paragraph 385). According to B. Sambasivaprasad, Gandhi fought imperial force nonviolently from Champaran to Dandi (Sambasivaprasad, 2020). Similar to the Buddhist principle of non-wanting, "*Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need, but not for every man's greed*" (Gandhi, 1942, as quoted in Nanda, 1977, p. 552). Integrating ethics and community humanism, the *yoga ashram* vows rest on the tenets of *satya* (truth) and *asteya* (don't steal).

To amplify Gandhi's counter-modernism and fight for independence, Western ideas are blended with Indian customs. *Ahimsa* was associated with Christian communism and "*bread labour*" in Leo Tolstoy's influential 1894 work, *Kingdom of God Is Within You*: Gandhi informed Tolstoy in 1910 that the Russian guru's book had left such a "*abiding impression*" on him that he decided to name his ashram in South Africa after him. "*The good of the individual is contained in the good of all*," said John Ruskin in the 1860s *Unto This Last*, condemning industrial capitalism and praising Gandhi's village-centered *swaraj*, which sparked *sarvodaya* (universal progress). Ethical economics, which Gandhi founded on a train journey in 1904, transformed his life and paved the way for self-sufficient villages. "*Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a*

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*prison.*” This quote from Henry David Thoreau’s *Civil Disobedience* (1849) laid the groundwork for the strategic disobedience that satyagraha relied on. According to Thoreau (1849/1993, p. 234) and Gandhi (1928/2008, p. 347), this was referred to as “*scientific confirmation*” for passive opposition to South Africa’s harsh laws by Gandhi. By incorporating Western principles such as pacifism, guild socialism, and conscientious objection, Gandhi’s Indian humanism is strengthened rather than watered down. According to this concept, *swaraj* (collective freedom) is the result of individual truth-seeking, or satyagraha (Varma, 1961, p. 285). Gandhi’s humanism stands in opposition to the soul-deadening logic of modernity. The eternal power for global transformation, according to them, is the satyagraha flame, or inner light. “*The foundational principle of my faith is nonviolence.*” Fischer reprinted Gandhi’s quote from 1921 on page 92 in 1950. My creed is so fulfilled.

**Gandhi’s Critique of Modernity:**

Hind Swaraj was the most vehement attack on modernity by Mohandas K. Gandhi. In his view, Western culture was a disease that, cloaked in the guise of enlightenment, shattered social relationships and encouraged imperial violence to continue. In this dialogic manifesto from 1909, while sailing from London to South Africa, the “*Reader*” who advocates passive resistance and the “*Editor*” who advocates soul-force debate the three issues plaguing modernity: the mechanical tyranny of industrialization, the ethical void of materialism, and the moral bankruptcy of rationalism. Gandhi believes that these problems lead to exploitation and a loss of spirituality in people. This civilization is irreligion,” he says. It has snatched Africa’s dark soul and is setting India up for the same fate... “*Civilization*” is what its adherents think when they see one segment of society crushed by another (Gandhi, 1909/1997, p. 37). This is a classic example of an early attack on technological “*advancements*” that promote commercialization over human flourishing, such as railways and telegraphs. “*Hospitals are institutions for propagating sin,*” Gandhi says with regret. He argues that contemporary transportation, the legal system, and medical treatment are all just band-aids that lead to moral decay and dependency. By transforming genuine *swaraj* (self-rule) into submission to machines, Gandhi lamented, “*These railways are a curse for India; they have precipitated moral degradation*” (Gandhi, 1909/1997, pp. 41, 43). Not a Luddite diatribe, but a humanist lament for broken bonds. Colonial wars and economic greed illustrate how “*the ends justify the means*” in contemporary society, which is at odds with *ahimsa*. “*We have given it to them; the English have not taken India,*” Gandhi remarked. They came to the United States for business on their first trip. “*The English would not be here today if we had chosen not to work together,*” Gandhi remarked.

Scholars agree that Gandhi anticipated the psychological and ecological costs of modern living

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according to this radical decolonial understanding. Anthony J. Parel, who edited Gandhi's writings, claims that Hind Swaraj thinks modernity is a "*moral disease*" that "*de-civilizes*" society because it separates morality and economics. Parel (1997) argues that "civilization of the soul" can be achieved by *sarvodaya*, or universal upliftment, and voluntary simplicity (p. xlvii). It is not a dismissal, but rather the appropriation of modernity's emancipatory potential for ethical ends that Gandhi does, as Bhikhu Parekh explains: "*Modernism's rationalism and individualism undermine community and spirituality, yet Gandhi appropriates its critique into constructive nonviolence that resists without continuing violence.*" According to Dennis Dalton, Gandhi saw industrialization as "*a form of violence against nature and the impoverished*" due to the fact that factories were responsible for urban misery and unemployment. Like Thoreau's civil disobedience, Gandhi viewed modern society as an internal issue that could only be solved via the truth-force of *satyagraha* (Dalton, 1993, p. 45). When Gandhi saw the "*satanic mills*" in Manchester, he saw the evil side of the Enlightenment—the fact that progress masks exploitation. Gandhi cautions that without soul-awakening resistance, "*God has not endowed the hearts of men with the capacity to eternally withstand the tyranny and oppression of the malevolent*" (1909/1997, p. 52). The ongoing fight of the soul against dehumanization and restoration of dignity is reflected in Gandhi's critique of the illusions of modernity, which provides a narrative relevant to our era of technocracy and global inequity.

### The Soul of Resistance: Satyagraha as Moral Praxis

Satyagraha, which means "*soul-force*" or "*truth-force*," is the foundation of Gandhi's humanism. By transforming passive endurance into active, peaceful advocacy for moral truth, this moral activity positions the soul as the unyielding frontline against the degrading impacts of modernity. The term "*satyagraha*" was his weapon of choice in the struggle against racism in South Africa. Truth (*satya*) implies love, and firmness (*agraha*) generates force; these two principles have developed into a way of life in which ahimsa and truth (*satya*) are inseparable. The Indian civil rights movement that I coined the term "Satyagraha"—"*the Force that is born of Truth and Love*" or "*nonviolence*"—was described by Gandhi in 1951 in Volume 6, page 107. This requires extreme introspection and courageously facing injustice head-on, not for retribution but to shock the oppressor into realizing their own complicity in the oppression. Industrial exploitation and imperial arrogance eroded human respect and societal harmony, but this has restored both. In Hind Swaraj, Gandhi argues that satyagraha is an alternative to violent rationalism. "*Passive resistance is securing rights by personal suffering; it is the opposite of resistance by arms*," according to him. Without re-creating the cruelty of oppressive institutions, the immorality of the *satyagrahi*'s voluntary sacrifice—striking, fasting, or marching—

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reveals it (Gandhi, 1909/1997, p. 90). Impartiality, tolerance, and loving-kindness are the tenets of practice, which is similar to *nishkama karma* from the Gita but more widely available for the benefit of all. Outside conquest takes a back seat to inner sovereignty in Gandhi's moral discipline of satyagraha. In contrast to the atomistic individualism and materialistic greed of modernity, it places an emphasis on genuine relationships. "One can't get to the truth by lying," it says. Honesty is the key to unlocking the truth. Are Truth and Kindness twins? An emphatic "no." Nonviolence and truth are mutually supportive. It has been claimed that they are in fact complementary, as Gandhi put it (1951, Vol. 35, p. 112). Satyagraha uses this reciprocal ethic in its pursuit of swaraj, or self-mastery on two fronts: politics and spirituality. An example of how individual transformation can spark societal upheaval is Gandhi's 1930 Salt March, a metaphorical demonstration against British rule that brought millions of people together with moral testimony instead of violent rebellion. "*Insistence on truth*" or "*truth holding*" is what Charles L. Lowery, Chetanath Gautam, and Chance D. Mays mean when they talk about this spiritual power of peaceful opposition that views disagreements as chances to make things better, grounded in the profound empathy of ahimsa: According to Lowery et al. (2016), p. 74, *satyagraha* is a method of peacefully resolving conflicts that views confrontations as chances to bring about change and reduce violence overall. Gandhi's teachings on educational leadership are applicable; he argues that, as a "*moral truth holder*," the scholar-practitioner should demonstrate contemplative authenticity by opposing neoliberal modernity with an integrated soul-force, and by combating systemic inequalities in order to foster empathy and connection.

By eschewing modernity's "ends justify the means" logic—as shown in Weberian rationalization and colonial extraction—in favor of unfaltering compassion that humanizes both sides, satyagraha demonstrates its moral force as the resistance movement's core principle. Bhikhu Parekh argues that satyagraha is more than just a strategy. Truth and nonviolence, he says, must be one's guiding principles throughout life. The purifying and converting power of suffering love is at the heart of satyagraha (Parekh, 1989, p. 168). The Truth Experiments of Mahatma Gandhi is a recounting of his truth experiments. In the face of discriminatory regulations, the Phoenix Settlement promoted morality through satyagraha, which means celibacy, frugality, and bravery. "*The initial step in nonviolence is to foster truthfulness, humility, tolerance, and loving-kindness in our daily interactions*" (Gandhi, 1927/1993, p. 289) is what he said. Examples of satyagraha, which Dennis Dalton terms a "revolutionary ethic," include the 1919 Rowlatt Satyagraha, which rallied Indians against repressive laws, and the use of voluntary suffering, which is different from masochism (Dalton, 1993, p. 112). Through the everlasting moral opposition of the soul, Gandhi's humanism is upheld by *satyagraha*, a moral discipline. The story argues that modernists might rediscover their humanity and transform

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resistance into a moral rebirth by accepting reality with compassion and steadfastness.

### **The Soul of Resistance: Gandhi's Humanism as a Counter-Narrative to Modernity**

A potent act of resistance, Gandhi's humanism is also an intellectual movement. The dehumanizing materialistic excesses and hierarchical individualism of modernity are at odds with the ethical interconnection, pacifism, and spiritual unity that comprise the human soul. Science and profit, according to Gandhi, take precedence over morality in today's society. He envisions a society that is disciplined and peaceful. If people choose 'dharma,' or morality and purpose, above 'arth,' or riches and pleasure,' then no amount of effort to improve humanity's situation will be successful, according to Rajni Bakshi. It goes against the current belief that material possessions and desires make people better. What really defines civilization, according to Gandhi, is not a rise of desires but rather their deliberate and willing reduction. This shift toward a more humane perspective was motivated by Gandhi's call for deliberate want reduction. The unrelenting progress of modernity, which annihilates social and ecological systems, prompted this reaction. People, in Gandhi's view, form "*an oceanic circle with the individual at its center, perpetually willing to sacrifice for the village, which is prepared to sacrifice for the collective of villages, ultimately culminating in a unified existence comprised of individuals.*" This idea challenges the contemporary power dynamics and the trend toward isolationism by promoting relational humanism.

In contrast to modernity's instrumental logic, which causes inequity and violence by separating means from objectives, Gandhi's humanism brings ethics into economic and political spheres. The supreme ethical principles are never contradicted by authentic economics, according to Gandhi. A quote by Gandhi is cited by Siby K. George. "*Real economics promotes equality; it helps everyone, even the most helpless among us, and it's necessary for living with respect.*" In contrast to humanistic equality, modernity's utilitarian logic prioritizes the strong over the weak for the benefit of the community. Thus, Gandhi's ahimsa encompasses not just the non-injury principle but also the promotion of active global welfare. "*A witness of ahimsa cannot adhere to the utilitarian formula,*" he declared. The current acceptance of progress's evil is broken by the statement, "*He will work for the greatest good of all and die trying to realize the ideal.*". I believe in Advaita, I believe in the inherent connectedness of man and for that matter of all that lives. That is why my resistance is soul-centered. Gandhi believed in this connection and shared it with others. In my opinion, the universe experiences a multiplicative effect of a person's spiritual growth or decline. The flawed and anthropocentric worldview of modernity, which separates humans from both nature and one another, is something I fight against.

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Historians like Ashis Nandy and Gandhi believe that the colonial past of modernity is associated with psychological and civilizational issues. “*The great victories of modern colonialism were not achieved so much by superior military might and technological capabilities as they were by the establishment of secular hierarchies that were incompatible with the traditional order,*” they assert. To overcome these inequalities, Gandhi’s humanism advocates for moral self-governance and egalitarianism. “*Authoritarianism, disenchantment, lack of community, and instrumental rationality*” are the results of modernity, says Nandy. He asserts that the “*multiplicity of self*” that has been eradicated by homogenized development narratives can be revived through Gandhi’s pluralistic humanism, which is based on cultural proximity and non-coercive speech. Like Gandhi, Bhikhu Parekh believes that contemporary society has “*neglected the soul, privileged the body, and misunderstood the nature and limits of reason.*” *Sarvodaya*, or the common good, is the goal of Gandhi’s cosmocentric humanism, which seeks to harmonize the body, mind, and soul. Humanism awakens “the natural moral tendency of man” to achieve peace, equality, and justice, and it opposes modernity’s exploitative systems that stem from modernity’s “*inhuman heart itself,*” as stated by Veerabhadra Rao Alladi and N. Srinivasa Rao. Similarly, Gandhi’s dharma is seen as a “*moral obligation and [connotation of] individual’s integrity as well as social harmony.*” A potent rebuttal to modernism, Gandhi’s humanism reinstates human dignity. A really civilized society, where the moral enlightenment of each individual heals the wounds in a world torn by ambition, is created by incorporating ethics into reality.

**Contemporary Resonance:**

Neoliberal globalization, digital alienation, increasing social and economic inequality, ecological and ethical challenges brought about by fast technological advancement—all of these can be addressed through Gandhi’s humanism. An ecological morality that goes against self-interest is necessary for real progress, according to Vandana Shiva, who cites Gandhi’s *sarvodaya*. This inclusive India, she says, “*must be ecological by its very nature... and must be based on indigenous traditions... because wasteful development would rob a large part of India.*” *Sarvodaya*, she continues, “means lifting up everyone.” She widens this idea to include worldwide struggles against corporations that plunder water and agriculture, where Gandhian self-sufficiency fortifies people against migratory patterns caused by climate change and food insecurity that affects billions. Akeel Bilgrami expands on Gandhi’s view of caste as non-hierarchical heterogeneity. “*The concept of heterogeneity is apt because, for him, diversity of work and profession is one among the many other aspects of a general cultural diversity that India’s longstanding pluralism had always respected,*” claims Bilgrami of this individual. To remedy the social atomization caused by market fundamentalism, Bilgrami suggests a

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pluralistic ethic and criticizes contemporary urban migrations and gig economies for taking advantage of caste in the name of meritocratic advancement. Vidyut Joshi argues that the social and political changes of the twenty-first century, such as the rise of artificial intelligence-driven unemployment and extreme inequality, necessitate a reinterpretation of Gandhian humanism. He argues that new projects need a reinterpretation of Gandhian humanism in light of the current political and social climate. Sustainable development, devolution of economic and political power, and economic and political ethics would all be part of this practice. Decentralized economies that value brotherhood over algorithmic efficiency and ethical AI governance were both pushed for by Gandhi, a champion and symbol of the downtrodden. Manjula Laxman uses these testimonials and Gandhi's talisman to expose the systemic harshness of poverty in today's post-liberalized society. Humanistic economics, which places a premium on justice rather than profit, is connected to his demand that people "*Recall the face of the poorest... Will it lead to Swaraj... for the hungry and also spiritually starved millions,*" as she puts it. Incorporating moral restraint into policy, this viewpoint fights global economic inequities and environmental degradation (as pointed out by Piketty), and it expresses Gandhi's bravery as an example of egalitarian perseverance in this difficult time.

**Conclusion:**

Rather than being a mere anticolonial artifact, Gandhi's humanism forms the very essence of resistance. In spite of the environmental disaster, exploitation, and alienation brought upon by modernity, this novel restores moral agency and interrelated dignity. In Gandhi's view, the three tenets of ahimsa, *sarvodaya*, and voluntary simplicity promote human flourishing over material advancement. According to Arne Naess's deep ecology synthesis, Gandhi's vision is referred to as "*a mature ecology.*" It represents a distinct kind of humanity in which individuals are not seen as primary but as components of a larger whole. This is an authentic reaction to the surface-level setting of modern industrialism. It suggests a way to restore the globe that takes into account both individual growth and the preservation of the biosphere in the face of climate change and biodiversity loss. While Gandhi's ideas are not static, they are "*a living tradition,*" as Anthony Parel puts them. This powerful allure is in keeping with Gandhian practice as dynamic. By giving it a human face through the pursuit of ethical truth, it prompts us to reconsider modernity. Incorporating spirituality into their desire for swaraj, modern movements like Fridays for Future, which is a worldwide youth rebellion, and Black Lives Matter, which is a nonviolent battle against institutional racism, are inspired by this philosophy. According to Ramachandra Guha, Gandhi's teachings take on greater significance in today's world plagued by war, inequality, and environmental degradation. At a time when artificial intelligence (AI)

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is pervasive and populism is dividing people, Gandhi's humanism serves as a moral compass for reimagining economics, ecology, and government. In the face of modernity's pyramid of dominance, Gandhi's spirit of resistance calls us to rise up and select the oceanic circle of mutual flourishing. On a genuinely civilized morning, this will guarantee that the shining light of humanity's finest essence, which has been nearly annihilated by development, will be there.

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