

in relation to multiple performance genealogies. Chapter 9 strengthens and arguably best substantiates the “aesthetics” claim by tying form to material conditions, arguing that historical exclusion from stages, economic constraints, and political threats shape a performance ecology of minimal props, mobility, direct address, and audience activation. Here, Naskar’s comparisons to Brechtian strategies and to Theatre of the Oppressed help situate Dalit theatre within broader histories of people’s theatre. Across Chapters 7–9, the book makes its most compelling case that Dalit theatre’s aesthetics is not reducible to themes and that it is also produced by performance conditions and political urgency.

The book’s main limitation lies where it promises the most: the sustained theorization of “aesthetics” through analysis of plays. Chapter 10, “Representation of Caste,” Chapter 11, “Representation of Class,” and Chapter 12, “Representation of Gender” are rich in coverage and provide valuable thematic pathways through major plays. However, they often move through extended plot summaries punctuated by interpretive statements rather than developing a consistent formal-analytic vocabulary for theatre. Chapter 10 is strongest when it pushes beyond narration, such as when it reads mythic legitimation as a structure of caste punishment (for instance, by using Shambuka as an interpretive frame) or when it briefly attends to symbolic dramaturgy. Chapter 11 offers the clearest justification for discussing class with caste and makes productive use of Achintya Biswas’s plays to show how caste fractures class solidarity. It also introduces race comparatively to illustrate how stigmatized identity becomes a mechanism of economic domination, though race functions more as analogy than as a fully theorized framework. Chapter 12’s intersectional argument is one of the book’s most important. It foregrounds Dalit feminist critique of mainstream feminism, defines Dalit feminism as resistance, identifies “Dalit patriarchy” as the reproduction of patriarchal power within Dalit communities, and raises the question of how tribal identity can be politically legible within Dalit solidarity. At the same time, the chapter acknowledges a key tension: while it includes a Dalit woman playwright (M. M. Vinodini), several of the analyzed plays are by Dalit men—an imbalance the book identifies but cannot fully remedy within its chosen corpus.

Overall, *Aesthetics of Dalit Theatre* is best understood as a comprehensive introduction and field map that will be especially useful for teaching and for orienting new research. Its strongest intervention lies in bringing together caste history, Dalit literary debates, and a pan-Indian survey of Dalit theatre, while also insisting that production and performance conditions are constitutive of Dalit theatre’s aesthetics. The book’s next step—whether for Naskar or for scholars building on this work—would be to develop a more consistent, systematic account of “aesthetics” at the level of theatrical form. That is, how staging, voice, rhythm, space, and audience interaction generate meaning beyond thematic exposition. Even with that limitation, the monograph remains a valuable, recommendable resource for students, scholars, and researchers seeking a grounded, expansive entry into caste, Dalit literature, and Dalit theatre in India.

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GANDHI’S CRITICS. By Subrata Mukherjee and Sushila Ramaswamy. New York: Routledge, 2026. 403 pp.

Few political figures have generated as much respect and as much contestation as Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. The debates surrounding the Gandhian thought became the central axis during the freedom struggle and continues to animate the political discourse even in contemporary India. From constitutional liberals’ uneasiness with mass agitation, to anti-caste thinkers who wanted

annihilation rather than reform of caste, to cultural nationalists who wanted to redefine the nation in civilizational terms, Gandhi's leadership was continuously contested. It is within this broader landscape that the volume *Gandhi's critics* by Subrata Mukherjee and Sushila Ramaswamy situates itself. They reconstruct the arguments of those who challenged him. The book is divided into eleven chapters, each dealing with a different thinker or an idea. Thus, this book provides an intellectual map of twentieth century Indian political thought.

The book in Chapter 1 starts by situating Gandhi within the earlier nationalist tradition, thus demonstrating that Gandhi's leadership did not emerge in vacuum, but evolved through engagement. Early nationalists such as Naoroji, Mehta, Surendranath believed in constitutional methods and sought national unity by avoiding confrontational mass agitation (pp. 2–3). They believed that extra constitutional methods were dangerous and unnecessary. For example, Surendranath and Gokhale favoured evolutionary reform and dominion status within empire. But there were some others who provided direct critique. For example, Valangaiman Srinivasa Sastri. He opposed non cooperation movement arguing it would close channels of negotiation and invite repression (pp. 7–8). Extremist leaders too offered sharper criticisms. Like Tilak warned Gandhi against introducing theology into politics and Bipin Chandra Pal regarded NCM as based on magic rather than logic (p. 17). The authors thus situate Gandhi not as a radical rupture, but as a figure positioned between continuity and transformation.

If the first chapter talked about tensions with constitutional moderates, the second chapter shifts the debate deeper by focussing on Nehru's, i.e. Motilal and Jawaharlal. Starting with Motilal, he argued for nationalists entering legislative councils. However, Gandhi disagreed, as he believed that by doing this, we are legitimizing colonial institutions. But, as authors argue, a compromise was eventually achieved as congress allowed council entry while maintaining broader Gandhian framework. The more substantive ideological divergence emerged in Jawaharlal Nehru's thought. He, who was influenced by Fabián socialism, scientific rationality and industrial modernity questioned Gandhi's focus on small scale village industry, and spinning wheel as an economic model. Similarly, to remove structural inequality, Gandhi focussed on trusteeship, but Jawahar on state intervention. Major was the uncomfotableness of Jawaharlal with Gandhi's use of religious vocabularies. But as the authors have shown, Jawaharlal public criticism of Gandhi in public remained measured, reflecting both personal deference and political strategy.

Then with Tagore in chapter 3, the debate moves into the realm of civilization and culture. For example, Tagore's major objection was related to NCM as he worried that mass mobilization based on negation could produce intellectual stagnation (pp. 58–65). He also questioned the boycott of educational institutions. Authors interpret this divergence as one between Tagore's constructive universalism and Gandhi's ethical resistant politics. Tagore also talked against aggressive nationalism as he feared it could become exclusionary and homogenizing (pp. 66–70). Gandhi's response was to reframe the very idea of nationalism by emphasising on swaraj as self-discipline and moral autonomy. The major disagreement was regarding charkha. For Tagore, turning it into a near-sacred symbol (pp. 70–75) would lead to stifling of artistic creativity. For Gandhi however, charkha was a symbol of economic self-reliance and dignity of labour. Similarly, there were disagreement on the Bihar earthquake of 1934, which Gandhi interpreted as a divine retribution of untouchability, a position Tagore rejected as morally and scientifically problematic.

Moving on, the next chapter presents a clash between Churchill's imperial paternalism and Gandhi's anti-colonial resistance. Churchill represents the most powerful imperial opposition to Gandhi. Churchill was not having a philosophical engagement with Satyagraha or economic theory, but was defending imperial sovereignty by asserting that India was unfit for self-rule. Churchill argued that India was mired by religious divisions, caste hierarchies and lacked political unity, so British rule was necessary to maintain order (pp. 96–104). But Gandhi rejected this premise by arguing that political capacity develops through practice. Churchill also saw non-violence as a moral coercion and politi-

cal blackmail and during quit India, he saw Gandhian methods as destabilizing wartime governance (pp. 105–112). Gandhi retorted by saying that non-violence is moral protest, not coercion and if British conscience is affected, that is the evidence of injustice. But as the authors argue, Churchill's opposition ultimately magnified international stature as Gandhi became a global symbol of anti-colonial resistance and Churchill became emblematic of imperial rigidity.

The next chapter shifts the focus to Jinnah. Unlike Churchill, Jinnah was initially part of the mainstream nationalist movement. His disagreement with Gandhi evolved gradually which ultimately led to ideological rupture. Jinnah's critique evolved basically in three stages viz. opposition to mass agitation; objection to religious mobilization; and, finally to assertion of separate nationhood. His initial comfort with Gandhi emerged during NCM (pp. 130–138). He basically feared that emotional politics would ultimately erode institutional negotiation. On the contrary, Gandhi believed that mass mobilization was necessary to democratize the nationalist movement. These disagreements later found its articulation in the two-nation theory by 1940 in the Lahore resolution (pp. 160–168). Gandhi however rejected this arguing that religion should not define nationality. But while evaluating Jinnah's claim, authors do not caricature Jinnah. They acknowledge that Muslim political anxieties were real, but two nation theory plural identities to religious binaries. At stake in this debate was not only representation, but the very definition of nationhood.

Chapter 6 then probes deeper into the social foundation of Indian society itself by examining E.V Ramasamy 'Periyar'. His disagreement with Gandhi centred around caste, religion and the priority of social over political, as he argued political independence without social equality was hollow (pp. 177–182). Periyar grounded his argument on how Nationalism marked social inequality and Brahmin dominance permeated congress leadership. He also rejected Gandhi's distinction between varna and untouchability. Similarly, he argued that Gandhi's harijan movement was paternalistic (pp. 187–190). Gandhi however relied on the idea of reform from within. Periyar rationality and atheism further deepened his rejection of religious symbolism in politics, unlike that of Gandhi. Authors here treat Periyar's critique seriously but they also argue that Gandhi's campaign against untouchability brought caste injustice into national discourse.

Following Periyar, the next chapter deals with Savarkar and his rejection of Gandhian non-violence and pluralistic nationalism. The debate between Savarkar and Gandhi represented cultural nationalism vs composite nationalism. This chapter showcases how Gandhi's vision of India faced not only colonial opposition, but also majoritarian nationalism. From the idea of nationhood, to non-violence and accusation of Muslim appeasement, this can be portrayed as the most ideologically polarized confrontation. Savarkar defined the nations in civilizational-cultural terms rather than only territorial. He rejected non-violence as an absolute political principle (pp. 204–210). His accusation of Muslim appeasement by Gandhi was based on the Moplah revolution. He also advocated militarization of Hindu society (pp. 214–218). Authors argue that cultural essentialism of Savarkar risks permanent communal division and Gandhi's inclusive nationalism had broader moral universality.

If Savarkar-Gandhi debate was ideologically polarized, Ambedkar's critique of Gandhi was most serious and structural. The sharpest confrontation between them was regarding treating depressed classes as a separate electorate (pp. 228–234), which ultimately culminated in Poona pact. Ambedkar also criticized Gandhi's romanticization of village life as for Gandhi, Villages are morally cohesive and self-sufficient. He also rejected Gandhi's idea of trusteeship. For Ambedkar, voluntary transformation of elites is unreliable and state must intervene structurally. Whereas for Gandhi, moral transformation of individuals could gradually eliminate exploitation. It was a debate of rupture vs reform.

The next chapter then shifts its gaze to Subhas Chandra Bose, who critiqued Gandhi on the idea of political strategy, tempo of struggle and legitimacy of armed resistance. His critique highlighted the limitations of Gandhian gradualism. For example, Bose regarded non-violence as a useful political strategy but not an absolute moral principle (pp. 242–250), as for Bose, the might of colonial rule requires armed confrontation. The most major confrontation was during the 1939 congress presi-

dency election. Facing organizational resistance, Bose resigned and later formed Forward Bloc. Talking economically also, Bose favoured strong centralized planning and industrialization, unlike Gandhi's emphasis on decentralized village republics.

The next chapter talks about the critique of Gandhi by the Marxists namely, M.N Roy, Evelyn Roy, Shripad Amrit Dange, R.P Dutt etc. There was diversity within Marxists on how they interpreted the role of Gandhi in the Indian national movement. For example, Dutt and Evelyn Roy, despite critiquing Gandhi, also saw many positive contributions of Gandhi (p. 296). However, Marxists overall challenged Gandhi on the tool of non-violence and how it was a bourgeois tactic (pp. 292-300). Nevertheless, as authors argue, Gandhi tried to eliminate the deep-rooted social and economic conflicts in Indian society, although his means of resolving conflict was very different from that of Marxists (p. 326).

Ultimately the final chapter presents shorter evaluations of Gandhi by Indian and Global figures such as P.C Ray, Visvesvaraya, George Orwell, Saul Alinsky etc. In this chapter, the authors raise a broader question that how did Gandhi's ideas were reinterpreted different political contexts. For example, Orwell admired Gandhi's personal integrity but questioned the universality of his methods. He questioned if Gandhi's idea will be effective against totalitarianism regimes like Nazi Germany or Stalinist Russia. Similarly, the American community organizer Alinsky argued that structures of domination which are entrenched could not be dismantled through moral appeal alone, Mandela, although influenced by non-violence, at last accepted armed resistance as necessary.

Taken together, these chapters reveal the extraordinary breadth of ideological engagement surrounding Gandhi. Nevertheless, the book is a herculean work that does sustained engagement with those who challenged Gandhi. Despite this, the book has certain limitations. For example, the major theme in all the chapters is that the critics are analysed through Gandhi rather than Gandhi being destabilized by them. It looks like the work is a reaffirmation of the paradigmatic status of Gandhian thought and less as a destabilization. Also, the book has limited engagement with subaltern historiography. The book primarily focuses on elite intellectuals but what about grassroots critiques like post-Ambedkarite Dalit intellectual traditions or for example, feminist critique of Gandhian views of sexuality etc. Lastly, the book is primarily synthetic rather than revisionist. It brings in and consolidates the debates effectively but does not radically reconfigure existing historiography.

However, what the book foregrounds is that Gandhian thought cannot be understood in isolation; it becomes intelligible only within the dense of opposite ideas which it isolated. Most importantly, the book succeeds in demonstrating that nationalist movement was not a unified moral struggle, but was a vibrant one. The book compels us to think seriously about a question which the authors have raised many times: Despite all the critiques, how do you explain the popularity of Gandhi? One may agree with Gandhi or reject his intellectual premises, but one cannot ignore his intellectual centrality. Ultimately, this book will serve as a valuable resource for scholars and students of intellectual history of South Asia and political theory.

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THE UNRAVELING HEART: WOMEN'S ORAL POETICS AND LITERARY VERNACULARIZATION IN MARATHI. By Madhuri Deshmukh. NY: Columbia University Press, 2025. 360 pp.

The study of bhakti religious practices in the Indian subcontinent mainly entails the study of the literature produced during the Bhakti movement. More often than not, the study of these