

**Revisiting Non-violence:  
Martin Buber's Open Letter to Mahatma Gandhi**

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This project aims to look at Mahatma Gandhi's response to the Jewish situation in Germany during Hitler's regime. Many Jewish leaders were aware of the enigmatic influence Gandhi's name carried all over the world. That was the reason why many of them approached Gandhi to seek his approval for Zionism and for the idea of a Jewish State hoping that Gandhi's fame as the leader of a non-violent national struggle against imperialism would provide a considerable impetus to the Jewish cause.

In response to the requests made by some prominent Jewish leaders, Gandhi wrote on November 26, 1938 an article in the *Harijan* entitled 'The Jews' commenting on the situation of the Jews in Germany and in Palestine. His response came as a shock to many from the Zionist quarters since Gandhi not only rejected the idea of a Jewish state but also questioned the very foundational logic behind the philosophy of political Zionism. While expressing his 'utmost' sympathies with the Jews in Germany, he maintained, "Why should they (Jews) not, like other people of the earth, make that country their home where they are born and where they earn their livelihood?"

Among the critical reactions from the Jewish quarters, Martin Buber's was the most vehement and bitter one. He wrote an open letter to Gandhi on February 24, 1939 criticizing the latter for his views on the Jewish situation and tried explaining to Gandhi the uniqueness of the Jewish condition at that time. Gandhi's efforts of drawing a parallel between the struggle of Indians in South Africa against the British imperialist regime (1893-1914) and his conviction of the effectiveness of non-violence are also criticized by Buber.

This project attempts to put this correspondence in context and bring it for the very first time into Marathi. The voluminous literature on Gandhi's life and teachings in Marathi does not include this important argument between a legendary preacher of non-violence from India and a pacifist Jewish philosopher. Main task of the project is to translate the article written by Mahatma Gandhi commenting on the Jewish situation and two Jewish responses to the same. One letter is written by Martin Buber and the other by Judah L. Magnes in the same year. Ironically both these letters perhaps never reached Gandhi. Hence researchers find it all the more important to put them in perspective while debating on issues like the link between religion and politics, use of force in fighting injustice etc.

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