



## Gandhian Approach to Peace and Non-violence

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**Abstract:** Gandhian non-violence challenges the notion that the principle is applicable in interpersonal relations and has no value in the public world. Gandhi emphasized that the law of love operates at all levels, and for him public life and values should be an echo of private life. Gandhi's concept of peace is also a broad one. For him peace emerged from a way of life. Therefore peace is intimately linked up with justice, development and environment. The Peace conveys the meaning of Peace with justice. Non-violence is no longer passive. It is a radical force. But these ideas have transformed and we now have different meanings of these terms. While innumerable people have contributed in changing the concept of peace, Gandhi, perhaps was the only person who changed the concept of non-violence. The redemptive character of self-suffering was emphasized by Gandhi and a constituted a key element of his Satyagraha technique. Gandhi's commitment to Non-violence evolved also from a careful reading of history and its interpretation. He came to the conclusion that it is Non-violence that has sustained the world so far and will sustain it in future too. In this paper the author examined the concept of Peace and Nonviolence, conflict resolution, Nonviolence in Globalization etc.

**Key Words:** Civil Society, Conflict Resolution, Humanness, Self-Suffering, Satyagraha, Civil Disobedience, Non-Cooperation.

### Introduction:

Although there has been a rethinking in different parts of the world about the use of violent methods to achieve social and political goals, it has not reached the mass for capturing the imagination of policy makers and civil society. There is a need to put forward strategic efforts by the international agencies, educators, academicians, activists, civil society actors and policy makers to take the non-violent agenda. It is necessary to examine the instances of successful application of non-violence methods but also analyse conflicts in terms of their potential for applicability of non-violent

methods as well as evolve suitable strategies for transforming violent conflicts into non-violent ones. There is a need to undertake measures on a continual basis at different levels in this regard.

Humanity is passing through a very difficult period. Violence and terrorism have become the catch words of international politics. After the 9/11 attacks on World Trade Centre and Pentagon, there is increasing realization that existing military solutions are inadequate to provide security to the people concerned. People all over the world are living in constant fear and insecurity. This precarious



situation and the futility of the weapons of mass destruction in ensuring peace prompt one to think about non-violent methods.

The growing concern of international community has been reflected in the declarations and decisions of international organizations including the United Nations. The United Nations in its 61<sup>st</sup> General Assembly declared October 2, the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi, as the international Non-Violence Day. The wide co-sponsorship of the draft resolution reflected the universal acceptance of the non-violent method successfully employed by Gandhi in South Africa and later in India. Mahatma Gandhi has now become a synonym for non-violence and peace.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Peace and non-violence:**

Many of us use peace and non-violence as synonyms. But during the last few decades these words have transformed their meanings. Peace no longer means the absence of war. The Peace conveys the meaning of Peace with justice. Non-violence is no longer passive. It is a radical force. But these ideas have transformed and we now have different meanings of these terms. While innumerable people have contributed in changing the concept of peace, Gandhi, perhaps was the only person who changed the concept of non-violence. Ahimsa, the Indian word for non-violence is commonly understood as doing no harm or injury to the other people. But Gandhi visualized it as a radical force. Even during the initial stages he explained the idea of positive non-violence. It was such an original idea that term was Satyagraha. He gave three synonymous words for Satyagraha. First

one has truth-force. He also called it love-force and he continues to call Satyagraha as soul force. Truth force is based on the principle of justice. He looked upon the whole concept of non-violence as a force for radical change. In Sanskrit language the word for truth is Satya and the root is 'Sat'. Sat means one that exists. For many who understand these two concepts, there is no difference in truth and existence. Love force can move mountains. Soul force envisages the unity of soul of all people. Satyagraha is the philosophy based on voluntary suffering.

His concept of peace and non-violence is integrally related to his world view. Gandhi evolved his world view from a concept of 'self' and human nature. Acknowledging the inherent goodness of human beings, Gandhi emphasized the capacity of all human beings to develop their full potential of non-violence. The path of violence was seen by him as a downward path away from our humanity and closer to that of brute while the path of Non-violence was closer to humanness. He believed in the unity and oneness of all including the sentient and non-sentient beings. He believed that all human beings are part of the divine and they are interdependent and interrelated. If one person gains in Non-violence, the entire humanity gains with him and vice versa. In such an interrelated and relational framework, Non-violence becomes the cardinal principle governing human relations.

#### **Gandhian concept of non-violence:**

Gandhi's concept of non-violence is closely linked with his understanding of the above interrelatedness. Truth was fundamental in his philosophy of life. He also wanted to make the truth



discovery as the principle around which the differences among human beings could be sorted out. Throughout his life he was experimenting and perfecting his notion of truth. For him Truth was a sovereign principle and it includes numerous other principles. Gandhi called Truth realization as the realization of the God. This quest for truth can be carried out not through any means. Violence is based on a notion that the person who employs it has the sole possession of Truth. Gandhi was of the view that the Truth known to human beings is never absolute but relative. Therefore a seeker of Truth has to adhere to the path of non-violence because unless he uses the method of Non-violence, he will not be able to be receptive to the notions of Truth held by others. Gandhi wanted that all struggles and conflicts should be approached as a contestation between the notions of relative truth held by the conflicting parties. Only through a non-violent method you will be able to pursue a struggle of this kind because in it truth contestation becomes a joint effort of both conflicting parties. In other words it becomes a joint search for Truth by the conflicting parties. There is no imposition of your notion of Truth. Just as you envisage the possibility of the conversion of other side to your position, the reverse possibility also cannot be ruled out.

For Gandhi, non-violence was a creed or an article of faith. He subscribed to non-violence on the basis of a deep faith in it. His complete adherence to non-violence was based on principles rather than opportunism or purely based on cost benefit considerations, although he was not unaware of its strategic value. For

Gandhi, it was not a weapon of expediency. It was a spiritual weapon and he successfully employed it at the mundane level. He made it clear that it is not a weapon of the weak and the coward. The application of this principle needs greater courage and moral strength. He believed that Ahimsa or Love has a universal application and it can be employed in one's own family, society and the world at the larger level. Through the technique of non-violence a seeker of Truth tries to convert his opponent by the force of moral character and self suffering. A practitioner of non-violence has to undergo suffering to penetrate into the heart of the opponent. Gandhi looked upon self-less suffering as the law of human beings and war as the law of jungle. How you can avoid pain and suffering is based on a utilitarian thinking, which is the basis of the much of the liberal thinking of the West. Suffering for a worthy cause in non-Western cultures is often seen as liberative, even if it emerged as the result of the application of violence against an oppressor. The redemptive character of self-suffering was emphasized by Gandhi and constituted a key element of his Satyagraha technique. Gandhi's commitment to Non-violence evolved also from a careful reading of history and its interpretation. He came to the conclusion that it is Non-violence that has sustained the world so far and will sustain it in future too.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Gandhian concept of peace:**

Gandhi's concept of peace is also a broad one. For him peace emerged from a way of life. Therefore peace is intimately linked up with justice, development and environment.



It may be noted that the well known peace researcher Johan Galtung acknowledged his debt to Gandhi in the evolution of his concept of structural and cultural violence. His advocacy of ideas such as self-reliance and models of development focused on basic needs also have a strong Gandhian imprint. Gandhi's influence could also be found in the ideas of Bjorn Hettne who has tried to focus on the relationship between models of development and peace. Similarly, Arne Naess who coined the term, deep ecology has acknowledged his indebtedness in the formulation of the term.<sup>3</sup>

A search for the philosophical basis of Gandhian concept of peace should begin with a careful reading of his seminal work Hind Swaraj which he wrote in 1909, where he criticized the modern model of development as inherently violent. One who scrutinizes Gandhi's speeches, writings and actions will understand his deep commitment for the cause of peace and non-violence which was a part of his philosophy of life and his world view. In the ideal society of Gandhi's vision the organization and relationship of the members of the society must be based on the law of non-violence or love. The real task before those who dream a peaceful and non-violence, Gandhi placed before humanity and contributes towards transformation of the existing society into a peaceful non-violent one. This task is a challenging one, but it is worth pursuing.

#### **Gandhian approach to conflict resolution:**

The people who established peace studies in the west- Johan Galtung and Kenneth Boulding were admirers of

Gandhi. However in west peace studies have taken a very different path to that of Gandhi. Probably the reason was that Gandhian peace demands a great deal of sacrifice from the practitioner. He calls it Satyagraha i.e. 'adherence to truth' and truth and non violence are the main planks of Satyagraha. A person who resolves to adhere to truth cannot remain silent at the sight of violence which is negative of truth. Truth functions in form of non violence or love. While the lover of truth ought to oppose violence such an opposition would mean 'fight the evil' while 'love the evil doer'. It is a dynamic soul force based on the concept of self- suffering. As there are many forms of injustices there are many forms of satyagraha too such as- non cooperation, civil disobedience, fasting, hijrat, hartal, picketing, boycott, and renunciation of titles, honours and positions.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Globalization and non-violence:**

Globalization instead of creating a global family has created a global market. The market is bargaining hard. There is no trust on the other side. Liberalization of the poor world means the liberty to die. Economic force joined hands with military forces and they control the political power. All this together means forces of death. We have gathered here because all of us want to live. The human kind does not want to commit suicide. We do not want to find the way to death. I am trying to explain the Gandhian method of solving these problems. The essential point of Gandhian method is to conscientize the people. By and large people of West and even many Indians looks upon the Gandhian method as a mere technique<sup>5</sup>. But to Gandhi, non-violence was a



technique as well as a way of life. You cannot just use non-violence without loving the adversary. Non-violent action is action without anger and hatred within oneself. Gandhi described Satyagraha as love force. The three essential elements in Satyagraha are, one firm faith in truth, two overflowing love for the adversary and three the capacity to undergo any amount of suffering.

#### **Universal applicability of non-violence:**

When Gandhi says that in the course of fighting for human rights, one should accept violence and self-suffering, he does not applaud cowardice. Cowardice for him is "the greatest violence, certainly, far greater than bloodshed and the like that generally go under the name of violence."<sup>6</sup> For Gandhi, perpetrators of violence (whom he referred to as criminals), are products of social disintegration. Gandhi feels that violence is not a natural tendency of humans. It is a learned experience. There is need for a perfect weapon to combat violence and this is nonviolence. Gandhi understood nonviolence from its Sanskrit root "Ahimsa". Ahimsa is just translated to mean nonviolence in English, but it implies more than just avoidance of physical violence. Ahimsa implies total nonviolence, no physical violence, and no passive violence.

Gandhi translates Ahimsa as love. This is explained by Arun Gandhi in an interview thus; "He (Gandhi) said ahimsa means love. Because if you have love towards somebody, and you respect that person, then you are not going to do any harm to that person."<sup>7</sup> For Gandhi, nonviolence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than any weapon of mass destruction. It is

superior to brute force. It is a living force of power and no one has been or will ever be able to measure its limits or it's extend. Gandhi's nonviolence is the search for truth. Truth is the most fundamental aspect in Gandhi's Philosophy of nonviolence. His whole life has been "experiments of truth". It was in this course of his pursuit of truth that Gandhi discovered nonviolence, which he further explained in his Autobiography thus "Ahimsa is the basis of the search for truth. I am realizing that this search is vain, unless it is founded on ahimsa as the basis."<sup>8</sup> Truth and nonviolence are as old as the hills. For nonviolence to be strong and effective, it must begin with the mind, without which it will be nonviolence of the weak and cowardly. A coward is a person who lacks courage when facing a dangerous and unpleasant situation and tries to avoid it. A man cannot practice ahimsa and at the same time be a coward.

#### **Satyagraha, the Centre of Gandhi's Contribution to the Philosophy of Nonviolence:**

It will be good here to examine what Stanley E. Jones calls "the centre of Gandhi's contribution to the world". All else is marginal compared to it. Satyagraha is the quintessence of Gandhism. Through it, Gandhi introduced a new spirit to the world. It is the greatest of all Gandhi's contribution to the world.

Satyagraha (pronounced sat-YAH-graha) is a compound of two Sanskrit nouns satya, meaning truth (from 'sat-' 'being' with a suffix 'ya'), and agraha, meaning, "firm grasping" (a noun made from the agra, which has its root 'grah-' 'seize', 'grasp', with the verbal prefix 'a' – 'to' 'towards'). Thus Satyagraha literally



means devotion to truth, remaining firm on the truth and resisting untruth actively but nonviolently. according to Michael Nagler Satyagraha literally means 'clinging to truth,' and that was exactly how Gandhi understood it: "clinging to the truth that we are all one under the skin, that there is no such thing as a 'win/lose' confrontation because all our important interests are really the same, that consciously or not every single person wants unity and peace with every other."<sup>11</sup> Put succinctly, Satyagraha means 'truth force' , 'soul force' or as Martin Luther Jr. would call it 'love in action'. Satyagraha has often been defined as the philosophy of nonviolent resistance most famously employed by Mahatma Gandhi, in forcing an end to the British domination. Gene Sharp did not hesitate to define Satyagraha simply as "Gandhian Nonviolence."<sup>12</sup>

Today as Michael Nagler would say, when we use the word Satyagraha we sometimes mean that general principle, the fact that love is stronger than hate (and we can learn to use it to overcome hate), and sometimes we mean more specifically active resistance by a repressed group; sometimes, even more specifically, we apply the term to a given movement like Salt Satyagraha etc. It is worthwhile looking at the way Gandhi uses Satyagraha.

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