



Gandhiji – Non-Violence

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Abstract: *There are three basic precepts essential to Satyagraha: Truth, Nonviolence and self-suffering. These are called the pillars of Satyagraha. Failure to grasp them is a handicap to the understanding of Gandhi's non-violence. In this context, the present paper try to explain the theory of non-violence, to assess the power of non-violence, Non-violence as political theory, to analyze the effects of non-violence, to understand the influence of non-violence the freedom of struggle and to explain the relevance of non-violence in the twenty first century.*

Key words: *Gandhiji, Non-Violence, Civil Disobedience Campaign*

Introduction

One how comes to power by Sword will perish by the Sword itself is the theory in political thought. On the flipside Gandhiji believed that truth and non-violence are the two Weapons that can achieve Independence for India, this idea of Gandhi made him un crowned emperor of the kingdom of Truth and non-violence he become role model for billions of people cross the world. Many freedom lovers followed Gandhiji's footsteps to achieve their goals.

Objectives:

1. To explain the theory of non-violence.
2. To assess the power of non-violence.
3. Non-violence as political theory.
4. To analyze the effects of non-violence.
5. To understand the influence of non-violence the freedom of struggle.
6. To explain the relevance of non-violence in the twenty first century.

In penning this brief tribute to Mahatma Gandhi I do so in all humility, as one who has never had the honour to meet him, but as a pacifist who sees in his gospel of non-violent resistance the only practical

solution to the problem of peace and war, and the only sane tactic in the social struggle. In the Civil Disobedience Campaign of 1930 Gandhi demonstrated the living power of non-violence, a magnificent example to a world that increasingly understands no power but the sword, and which is seemingly incapable of learning that violence never defeats violence but merely begets it.

I am well aware that the Mahatma did not invent the principle of non-violence, that it has existed in India for centuries as religious, tenet, but Gandhi, as Brailsford has said, reaffirmed it "against the drift of Western teaching and example," and rose to his tremendous moral power as a leader of his people through this reaffirmation. During the nationalist struggles of 1930 he gave to his millions of followers not merely a political tactic but a profound religious faith such as Christ gave to those early Christians who faced martyrdom for their inspired interpretation of Truth.

Today as 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.

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.

What is Satyagraha?

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. Since the only way for Gandhi getting to the truth is by nonviolence (love), it follows that Satyagraha implies an unwavering search for the truth using nonviolence. Satyagraha according to Michael Nagler 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"⁹ 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."

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Gandhi View of Satyagraha

Satyagraha was not a preconceived plan for Gandhi. Even in his life culminating in his "Bramacharya vow", prepared him for it. He therefore underlined: Events were so shaping themselves in Johannesburg as to make this self-purification on my part a preliminary as it were to Satyagraha. I can now see that all the principal events of my life, culminating in the vow of Bramacharya were secretly preparing me for it.¹² Satyagraha is a moral weapon and the stress is on soul force over physical force. It aims at winning the enemy through love and patient suffering. It aims at winning over an unjust law, not at crushing, punishing, or taking revenge against the authority, but to convert and heal it. Though it started as a struggle for



political rights, Satyagraha became in the long run a struggle for individual salvation, which could be achieved through love and self-sacrifice. Satyagraha is meant to overcome all methods of violence. Gandhi explained in a letter to Lord Hunter that Satyagraha is a movement based entirely upon truth. It replaces every form of violence, direct and indirect, veiled and unveiled and whether in thought, word or deed. Satyagraha is for the strong in spirit. A doubter or a timid person cannot do it. Satyagraha teaches the art of living well as well as dying. It is love and unshakeable firmness that comes from it. Its training is meant for all, irrespective of age and sex. The most important training is mental not physical. It has some basic precepts treated below.

The Basic Precepts of Satyagraha

There are three basic precepts essential to Satyagraha: Truth, Nonviolence and self-suffering. These are called the pillars of Satyagraha. Failure to grasp them is a handicap to the understanding of Gandhi's non-violence. These three fundamentals correspond to Sanskrit terms:

- *Sat/Satya* – Truth implying openness, honesty and fairness
 - *Ahimsa*/Nonviolence – refusal to inflict injury upon others.
 - *Tapasya* – willingness to self-sacrifice.
- These fundamental concepts are elaborated below.

1.Satya/Truth:

Satyagraha as stated before literally means truth force. Truth is relative. Man is not capable of knowing the absolute truth. Satyagraha implies working

steadily towards a discovery of the absolute truth and converting the opponent into a trend in the working process. What a person sees as truth may just as clearly be untrue for another. Gandhi made his life a numerous experiments with truth. In holding to the truth, he claims to be making a ceaseless effort to find it. Gandhi's conception of truth is deeply rooted in Hinduism. The emphasis of Satya-truth is paramount in the writings of the Indian philosophers. "*SatyannastiParodharmati* (*SatyanNastiParo Dharma Ti*) – there is no religion or duty greater than truth", holds a prominent place in Hinduism. Reaching pure and absolute truth is attaining moksha. Gandhi holds that truth is God, and maintains that it is an integral part of Satyagraha. He explains it thus:

The world rests upon the bedrock of satya or truth; asatya meaning untruth also means "nonexistent" and satya or truth, means that which is of untruth does not so much exist. Its victory is out of the question. And truth being "that which is" can never be destroyed. This is the doctrine of Satyagraha in a nutshell.

2.Ahimsa:

In Gandhi's Satyagraha, truth is inseparable from Ahimsa. Ahimsa expresses as ancient Hindu, Jain and Buddhist ethical precept. The negative prefix 'a' plus himsa meaning injury make up the world normally translated 'nonviolence'. The term Ahimsa appears in Hindu teachings as early as the Chandoya Upanishad. The Jain Religion constitutes Ahimsa as the first vow. It is a cardinal virtue in Buddhism. Despite its being rooted in these Religions, the special contribution of Gandhi was:To



make the concept of Ahimsa meaningful in the social and political spheres by moulding tools for nonviolent action to use as a positive force in the search for social and political truths. Gandhi formed Ahimsa into the active social technique, which was to challenge political authorities and religious orthodoxy.

It is worth noting that this 'active social technique which was to challenge political authorities', used by Gandhi is none other than Satyagraha. Truly enough, the Indian milieu was already infused with notions of Ahimsa. Nevertheless, Gandhi acknowledged that it was an essential part of his experiments with the truth whose technique of action he called Satyagraha. At the root of Satya and Ahimsa is love. While making discourses on the Bhagavad-Gita, an author says: Truth, peace, righteousness and nonviolence, *Satya*, *Shanti*, *Dharma* and *Ahimsa*, do not exist separately. They are all essentially dependent on love. When love enters the thoughts it becomes truth.

When it manifests itself in the form of action it becomes truth. When Love manifests itself in the form of action it becomes *Dharma* or righteousness. When your feelings become saturated with love you become peace itself. The very meaning of the word peace is love. When you fill your understanding with love it is *Ahimsa*. Practicing love is *Dharma*, thinking of love is *Satya*, feeling love is *Shanti*, and understanding love is *Ahimsa*. For all these values it is love which flows as the undercurrent.

3.; Tapasya (Self-Suffering);

it remains a truism that the classical yogic laws of self-restraint and self-discipline are familiar elements in Indian

culture. Self-suffering in Satyagraha is a test of love. It is detected first of all towards the much persuasion of one whom is undertaken. Gandhi distinguished self-suffering from cowardice. Gandhi's choice of self-suffering does not mean that he valued life low. It is rather a sign of voluntary help and it is noble and morally enriching. He himself says 'It is not because I value life lo I can countenance with joy Thousands voluntary losing their lives for Satyagraha, but because I know that it results in the long run in the least loss of life, and what is more, it ennoble those who lose their lives and morally enriches the world for theirsacrifice. Satyagraha is at its best when preached and practiced by those who would use arms but decided instead to invite suffering upon them. It is not easy for a western mind or nonoriental philosopher to understand this issue of self-suffering. In fact, in Satyagraha, the element of self-suffering is perhaps the least acceptable to a western mind. Yet such sacrifice may well provide the ultimate means of realizing that characteristic so eminent in Christian religion and western moral philosophy: The dignity of the individual.

The three elements: Satya, Ahimsa, Tapasya must move together for the success of any Satyagraha campaign. It follows that Ahimsa – which implies love, leads in turn to social service. Truth leads to an ethical humanism. Self-suffering not for its own sake, but for the demonstration of sincerity flowing from refusal to injure the opponent while at the same time holding to the truth, implies sacrifice and preparation for sacrifice even to death.



Satyagraha in Action

For Satyagraha to be valid, it has to be tested. When the principles are applied to specific political and social action, the tools of civil disobedience, noncooperation, nonviolent strike, and constructive action are cherished. South Africa and India were 'laboratories' where Gandhi tested his new technique. Satyagraha was a necessary weapon for Gandhi to work in South Africa and India. Louis Fischer attests that: "Gandhi could never have achieved what he did in South Africa and India but for a weapon peculiarly his own. It was unprecedented indeed; it was so unique he could not find a name for it until he finally hit upon Satyagraha."

South Africa is the acclaimed birthplace of Satyagraha. Here Satyagraha was employed to fight for the civil rights of Indians in South Africa. In India, Gandhi applied Satyagraha in his socio-political milieu and carried out several acts of civil disobedience culminating in the Salt March.

Another wonderful way of seeing Satyagraha in action is through the fasting of Mahatma Gandhi. Fasting was part and parcel of his philosophy of truth and nonviolence. Mahatma Gandhi was an activist – a moral and spiritual activist. And fasting was "one of his strategies of activism, in many ways his most powerful."

Qualities of a Satyagrahi (Nonviolence Activist)

Gandhi was quite aware that there was need to train people who could carry on with his Satyagraha campaigns. He trained them in his "Satyagraha Ashrams". Here are some of the basic qualities of expected of a Satyagrahi.

- A Satyagraha should have a living faith in God for he is his only Rock.
- One must believe in truth and nonviolence as one's creed and therefore have faith in the inherent goodness of human nature.
- One must live a chaste life and be ready and willing for the sake of one's cause to give up his life and his possessions.
- One must be free from the use any intoxicant, in order that his reason may be undivided and his mind constant.
- One must carry out with a willing heart all the rules of discipline as may be laid down from time to time.
- One should carry out the jail rules unless they are especially dense to hurt his self-respect.

A satyagrahi must accept to suffer in order to correct a situation. In a nutshell, Satyagraha is itself a movement intended to fight social and promote ethical values. It is a whole philosophy of nonviolence. It is undertaken only after all the other peaceful means have proven ineffective. At its heart is nonviolence. An attempt is made to convert, persuade or win over the opponent. It involves applying the forces of both reason and conscience simultaneously, while holding aloft the indisputable truth of his/her position. The Satyagrahi also engages in acts of voluntary suffering. Any violence inflicted by the opponent is accepted without retaliation. The opponent can only become morally bankrupt if violence continues to be inflicted



indefinitely. Several methods can be applied in a Satyagraha campaign. Stephen Murphy gives primacy to "noncooperation and fasting". Bertrand Russell has this to say about Gandhi's method:

The essence of this method which he (Gandhi) gradually brought to greater and greater perfection consisted in refusal to do things, which the authorities wished to have done, while abstaining from any positive action of an aggressive sort.... The method always had in Gandhi's mind a religious aspect... As a rule, this method depended upon moral force for its success.

Murphy and Russell do not accept Gandhi's doctrine totally. Michael Nagler insists that they ignore Constructive Programme, which Gandhi considered paramount.

Conclusion

It is not necessary to endorse, personally, the ethics of a saint in order to respect and admire his saintliness. If much in Gandhi's interpretation of Ahimsa seems, to the opposing materialist philosophy, anti-life, it has to be acknowledged that on the spiritual plane, which is Gandhi's chief concern, it is very much the reverse, and as Gandhi himself has pointed out, all faiths have produced great men and women. For the world to-day it is as the living exponent of the power of non-violence that Mahatma Gandhi shines in our midst like a beacon light. "Others abide our question; thou art free... out-topping knowledge." Yet his wisdom is for all men, for all time.

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