



Gandhian Philosophy and Consciousness of Non-Violence

Dr. Raghvendra Yadav

Assistant Professor

Department of History

Central University of Himachal Pradesh,

Dharmshala (H.P.)-177101

010raghvendrasingh@gmail.com

Abstract

Truth and nonviolence are as old as the hills. Non-violence contains a universal applicability and it was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi who unequivocally established it in the modern world ravaged by wars. His philosophy saw no difference between truth and ahimsa or rather found it inseparable. Ahimsa for him was the means, and truth, the end. Thus, the only way to realise the truth, i.e. the god was the way of non-violence. In fact, realising this truth as god was the ultimate purpose of life. The essence of his arguments is that one must try to practice non-violence in thoughts, words and deeds and to organize all life activities on its basis. This would, in a way, bring in unprecedented and revolutionary changes in human life.

Keywords: Truth, Violence, Ahimsa, Philosophy, Humanity, God.

DOI Number: 10.48047/nq.2022.20.22.NQ10255

NeuroQuantology 2022; 20(22): 2658-2663

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, or Gandhiji, is a universal symbol of 'truth' and 'non-violence'. He considered God and truth as one and truth and non-violence as one. The political theory of Gandhiji is, thus, one real and modern way to understand and arbitrate in any conflict arising out of any degradation in the morality of an individual or the society. Gandhiji, through his philosophy, offers us a vision of political action that insists on the feasibility of the search for truth and the implicit possibility of mediating among competing claims to truth. He believed that the idea of *Ahimsa* (Non-violence) is very ancient, because it is contained in the Vaishnavite, Jains and Buddhist philosophy. Gandhiji agreed with St. Paul's charity as "an approximation" but felt that "it does not sufficiently imply respect for the non-humans".ⁱ Non-violence is of two types, passive

and dynamic. Gandhiji made a distinction between the two. He repudiated the passive non-violence of the Jains and Mennonites and insisted that "Ahimsa is dynamic, not passive".ⁱⁱ He further acknowledged that "Non-violence in its dynamic condition means conscious suffering".ⁱⁱⁱ Paul F. Power also holds the view that Ahimsa is the perfect means to reach ultimate truth; the supreme good is higher in the scale of values than dynamic non-violence.^{iv} And it is because of this that his pacifism tended to be non-violent.

Gandhi's idea of non-violence finds its full expression in this extract, "The religion of non-violence is not meant for the Rishis and saints. It is meant for the common people as well".^v He further added, "The basic principles of non-violence rest on what holds good in respect of oneself equally applies to the whole universe".^{vi}

2658



Nobody can deny that with non-violence all problems even of the present day can be tackled. Gandhiji contended that non-violence did not mean surrender to evil. It does not also mean compromise with violence. By violence, he meant, "Causing pain to or killing any life out of anger, or from a selfish purpose, or with the intention of injuring it".^{vii} According to him, violence destroys the very possibility of the change of heart which is the essence of moral regeneration, because non-violence is the law of our species as violence is the law of the brute.

Non-violence, for Gandhiji, was the natural law of life. According to him, it must pervade the whole being and should not be applied to isolate behaviours. A follower of this philosophy should be non-violent in every stage or any circumstances. He should not, in other words, be non-violent at one place and violent at another. Non-violence must, therefore, pervade the whole man. All pervasiveness is its characteristic. It should be borne in mind that the life of man cannot be departmentalized. It is one indivisible whole. This is the main reason that Gandhiji adopted this philosophy of non-violence as operative in the whole life of man and not to acts committed in isolation. Non-violence as law of life also applies to those who act violently. This law should not also be practiced both at the individual and national basis. For practicing the creed of non-violence, it is necessary to follow serious study, tremendous perseverance and thorough cleansing of one's self. It does not merely signify philosophizing; it is embodied in life and out of self-culture it takes shape.

"Non-violence", he wrote "is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man".^{viii} He again said that non-violence has got to be all "pervasive". One cannot be non-violent about one of his activities and violent about others.^{ix} No doubt, the whole life and all the activities of Gandhiji revolve around non-violence.

In the history of mankind, there is sufficient evidence which throws light on the graph of the

development of violence. Gandhiji was very much struck with this development of violence prevailing in society everywhere. He then came to realize that violence cannot be met by violence but only by non-violence. This was the basic concept behind the acceptance of non-violence by him. He was of the view that violence can be minimized through the application of non-violence only.

He described non-violence as a state of perfection. He said: "It is a goal towards which all mankind moves naturally though unconsciously. Man does not become divine when he personifies innocence in himself. Only then does he become truly man. In our present state we are partly men and partly beasts and in our ignorance and even arrogance say that we truly fulfill the purpose of our species".^x He further explained that, "perfect non-violence is impracticable. Nobody knows, for nobody can practice perfect non-violence. It can be used in politics precisely as it can be used in the domestic sphere. We may not be perfect in our use of it, but we definitely discard the use of violence and grow from failure to success".^{xi}

The function of non-violence, according to Gandhiji, is different from other moral laws in the sense that its source is divine. The votary does not act with his strength. Strength comes from God. "All through my life", says Mahatma Gandhi "I have acted in that faith. Never have I attributed any independent strength to myself. This may be considered by men who do not believe in a higher power than themselves as a drawback and a helpless state. I must admit that limitation of ahimsa if it be accounted as such".^{xii} This moral power is "humanly operated upon, but divinely controlled. It is inconceivable without the control of God. Hence, a man who believes in non-violence also believes in God as the ultimate source of all moral strength. It is the greatest moral force at the disposal of mankind".^{xiii} It is mightier than even the mightiest weapons ever devised by the ingenuity of man. There is, as such, no defeat in it.

In spite of the merits that this weapon of non-violence possesses, it is evident that it cannot

be adopted as very popular weapon of moral regeneration. People still find, convenient to follow the path of violence. But this is highly improper. There are innumerable examples in the history of mankind where people from all walks of life have successfully used non-violence in solving their complicated problems.^{xiv} But the tragedy is that this principle has not been properly evolved. It must be acknowledged that the science of non-violence is yet to be properly practiced. It has not been properly propagated by saints and other advocates of this force who usually keep themselves aloof from the world. The failure of this mighty force is due to the lack of moral strength on the part of men who apply it. It is, therefore, necessary to be morally strong in order to practice this great weapon of non-violence.^{xv}

It must be stated here that the great weapons of truth and non-violence are not new ideals. They are the eternal principles of life preached by thousands of men in the past. But these weapons lacked universality and fullness of meaning. They were regarded as cloistered virtues. It was the great adventure of Gandhiji that he reinterpreted and restated these fundamental principles of human behaviour in new ways and showed their universality.^{xvi} He made several experiments with them with great zeal and applied them in an original way practically in every aspect of human life. In order to practice these principles, he established several organizations and trained experts. He founded Phoenix, Tolstoy Farm and Sabarmati Ashram for this purpose.^{xvii} He said, "If therefore He (God) wished to make the Ashram His instrument as regards any activity, it was for Him to place the requisite men and munitions at the Ashram's disposal. Phoenix, Tolstoy Farm and Sabarmati Ashram have all been run more or less according to these principles consciously or unconsciously".^{xviii} He advocated and advised people to practice these ideals in every situation of life. He also demonstrated to the world the inexhaustible source of power behind these moral forces.

In India, non-violence is, however, becoming ineffective after independence. The state,

whether communist, democratic, oligarchic or monarchic, must be the seat of sovereignty. A question is sometimes raised: Can any sovereign country exist and function without force? It is difficult to give a clear-cut answer to this question. It seems to us that no state can function without the use of force of army. Every country is the custodian of law and order in its own domain. In order to achieve this end, it employs the appropriate means. It has to develop its defence in order to keep pace with other progressing countries of the world. It must also be ready to meet any challenge from any country. G.C. Chatterji has said, "The doctrine of the Supreme authority of the individual conscience and the denial of all authority to the state, leads to anarchism and not a well ordered political and social order".^{xix} Gandhiji himself had to accept the importance of force for free India. He also advocated for the judiciary, the executive, the police force, and a code of conduct for a free country like India. He said, "Even in a non-violent state, a police force may be necessary.... I have not the courage to declare that we can carry on without a police force".^{xx} Here, we may not forget that Gandhiji himself was very much rigorous in the application of the method of non-violence. But it is difficult for everybody to apply it rigorously with all its deeper implications to all aspects of human life. However, the importance of the principle of non-violence cannot be minimized. On the other hand, we cannot, completely reject the utility of this great legacy of the Mahatma. It is true that he accepted police force but his conception of the use of police force was somewhat different from what is generally understood these days. He said, "They (police) will be servants, not masters of the people... The police force will have some kind of arms, but they will be rarely used, if at all. In fact the policemen will be reformers."^{xxi} Hence, non-violence is as far as practicable. If non-violence be accepted in this sense, we do not find any harm in accepting it as one of the methods of establishing a new social order, which is very relevant in the present social structure.

Michael Scott articulated that non-violence is “not only the crisis but also the undergirding equilibrium to which non-violence has come”.^{xxii} W.R. Miller holds, “paradoxically it is a crisis of success as well as of failure”.^{xxiii} Again, there are historical evidences which go to show that non-violence has come to such a feasible stage in the history of our freedom struggle that it cannot in any way provide better conditions of discipline, organizations, etc. Therefore, Scott favoured impartial international power which can revolutionize the individual’s mind and can provide better prospect of a new society. According to Gandhiji, to harp on the old tune, i.e. the adherence and maintenance of the idea of non-violence does not carry very much the elements of social progress. We are inclined to agree with Scott, because the way to social progress is long and full of difficulties which cannot be overcome merely by accepting the principle of non-violence. The present day world has proved the ineffectiveness of the principle of non-violence.

Even the most ardent and one of the champions of non-violent movement, W.R. Miller has said that Gandhiji “led us out of darkness of conventional wisdom and showed us the falsity of the generally accepted belief in the supremacy of violence. Dazzled by the brilliance of his great deed, we were tempted to see it as magical – as children are prone to do. Now we see where we are, at the footpath of enlightenment scarcely knowing how far it may lead us, but aware that we have a long way to go”.^{xxiv} Toynbee also was of the opinion that the greatness of Mahatma Gandhi did not lie in the use of the method of non-violence for freeing India from foreign rule. He said, “He (Gandhiji) should have demonstrated the efficacy of the method of non-violence – the people-oriented, all embracing movement for social and political emancipation to the rest of the world and set up a model for others”.^{xxv}

Gandhiji sometimes used to identify truth with ahimsa but it seems very difficult to agree with him because the two cannot be equated. Truth has greater importance in life than non-violence. Even in strifes and unusual

circumstances truth prevails. But non-violence may not be accepted by every individual and in all circumstances. Besides, non-violence is the means and truth is the end, and the two cannot therefore be equated. He himself realized this difficulty and maintained that non-violence is the only and sole means of realizing the truth. Here, we may agree with him in accepting his views in regard to non-violence as the correctness, cleanliness, and sanctity of means. According to him, pure means are as important as ends. He believed that, “If we take care of the means, we are bound to reach the end sooner or later”.^{xxvi} This is one of the greatest contributions of Gandhiji in regard to individual’s conduct. He wrote in his autobiography, “...if every page of these chapters does not proclaim to the reader that the only means for the realization of Truth is Ahimsa, I shall deem all my labour in writing these chapters to have of one in vain.”^{xxvii} Truth is an integral concept whereas ahimsa is evolved by man and it is applicable to him not in the universe. The existence of truth cannot be denied by any person. It is all pervasive which cannot be questioned. Ahimsa, on the other hand, is not always possible. Gandhiji said, “Perfect non-violence is impossible so long as we exist physically, for we would want some space atleast to occupy. Perfect non-violence whilst you inhabit the body is only a theory like Euclid’s point or straight line, but we have to endeavour every moment of our lives.”^{xxviii} Hence, it seems that violence cannot be checked everywhere and on every scale. Only truth prevails and cannot be denied.

In spite of certain limitations of non-violence, we cannot deny the importance of it even in present days. Non-violence has certain merits in it which are very helpful in achieving the new Global society of world. It helps man in bringing about a democratic pattern of behaviour. It may also be stated here that Gandhiji’s concept of social life based on non-violence finds support from the great sociologist thinker Jacques Novicow. He replaces the economic, political and physiological struggles of man by a bloodless intellectual competition. August



Comte also hoped “for the supremacy of beneficence and universal consensus.”^{xxix} Non-violence represents mutual adjustment, social coordination and socio-mental correlation, which is needed today too. It stands for accommodation and cooperation in place of tension, antagonism and conflict. It also stands for increasing relationship between the different groups, races, classes and nations into which the whole humanity is apparently divided. Gandhiji believed that the force of violence would be replaced by the authority of justice, truth and peace. Here, Gandhi’s views can well be compared with that of Coleden, Kant, Spencer and Bright. They believed that the progress of reason, individuality and right would lead to extinction of power and the realization of such a society would be founded on peace. Non-violence, as stated above, is a higher form of truth. Gandhi’s explanation of non-violence is of greater importance than Rousseau who also accepts the voluntaristic conception of will for the public good. Bosanquet has also in his own way advocated the principle of non-violence but his conception of non-violence is not so popular in comparison with Gandhiji’s conception. He

identified ahimsa with truth as “the real will of the individual, the general will of the society and the political will of the state.”^{xxx}

In the present political situation, the movement for Jan Lokpal Bill, launched by Anna Hazare, is the best example of the relevance of the Gandhian philosophy of non-violence. The movement spread out in the whole country on the basis of Gandhian techniques and its grand success proved that the Gandhian philosophy of non-violence is not only relevant today, but is essential for the removal of all the social as well as political evils not only of India but of the whole world.

Today, we feel that consciousness and self consciousness is missing somewhere, which is why the problem of extremism, corruption and social distortion has not been come over. Hence the consciousness on the basis of Gandhian philosophical and ethical values has become much more timely and significant. An individual, who becomes conscious, as per Gandhian philosophy, will find all the problems vanishing automatically.

2662

References

- ⁱM.K. Gandhi, For Pacifists, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1949, pp. 4-5.
- ⁱⁱM.K. Gandhi, Satyagraha, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1951, p. 134.
- ⁱⁱⁱYoung India, August 11, 1920, p. 713.
- ^{iv}Paut F. Power, Gandhi on World Affairs, The Perennial Pres, Bombay, 1961, p. 31.
- ^vYoung India August 11, 1920, p. 712.
- ^{vi}Ibid.
- ^{vii}Harijan, November 12, 1938, p. 329.
- ^{viii}M.K. Gandhi, Non-Violence in Peace and war, Vol. I, p. 292.
- ^{ix}K. Ratnam, Non Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi and its Impact on Freedom Struggle of India, p. 16.
- ^xM.K. Gandhi, Ashram Observances in Action, p. 11.
- ^{xi}Paul Power, Gandhi on World Affairs, p. 29.
- ^{xii}M.K. Gandhi, From yeravda mandir, p. 29.
- ^{xiii}Young India, September 23, 1926, p. 1182.
- ^{xiv}Young India, November 1919, p. 5.
- ^{xv}N.K. Bose, Selections From Gandhi, p. 218.
- ^{xvi}A.C. Kapoor, Principles of Political Science, p. 606.
- ^{xvii}Ibid, p. 607.



- ^{xviii}M.K. Gandhi, *The Science of Satyagraha*, p. 29.
- ^{xix}G.C. Chatterji, “Recollections and Reflection”, *Gandhi Marg*, January, 1958, p. 17.
- ^{xx}M.K. Gandhi, *India of My Dreams*, p.81.
- ^{xxi}Sugata Das Gupta quotes in “Gandhin Concepts for a new Society”, *Gandhi Marg*, 55, Vol. 14, Oct., p. 341.
- ^{xxii}N.K. Bose, *Selections From Gandhi*, p. 155.
- ^{xxiii}W.R. Miller, *Experimentation in Non-violence. The next Phase “Gandhi And His Relevance for Our Times*, G. Ramchandran and T.K. Mahadevan, eds, *Bharatrya Vidya Bhawan, Bombay*, 1964, p. 126.
- ^{xxiv}*Ibid.*
- ^{xxv}*Ibid*, p. 127.
- ^{xxvi}M.K. Gandhi, *Hindu Dharma*, p. 24.
- ^{xxvii}M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, p. 382.
- ^{xxviii}N.K. Bose. *Selections From Gandhi*, p. 154.
- ^{xxix} M.K. Gandhi, *Non Violence in peace and war*, Vol. I, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1948, pp. 310-11.
- ^{xxx}M.K. Gandhi, *Hindu Dharma*, p. 165.

About the Author:

*Dr Raghvendra Yadav is Assistant Professor of History at Central University of Himachal Pradesh.

