

A STUDY ON GANDHIAN NON-VIOLENCE IN CONTEMPORARY ERA

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ABSTRACT

In the realm of peace and humanism the name of Mahatma Gandhi is well known globally. His ideas are shaped by numerous great philosophers. He can be regarded as a social reformer who immensely tried to build a new human society consisting of peaceful domain. His ultimate vision was *Sarvodaya* i.e., welfare to all or upliftment of all through the path of truth and non-violence. Hence through a discussion in this paper, we will try to highlight the Gandhian core concept of Non-violence. In addition, we aim to enumerate whether this non-violence or *ahimsa* principle is a dilemma in bringing justice or resilience, with special reference to contemporary issues of India. If it is a dilemma, how can we deal with it and if it is resilience, how can we reach there, it should be discussed constructively. Again, as this era is full of unstable mindsets, advancements of technologies, how can we rely on this principle at present is debatable. Thus, we, the conscious citizens of the largest populous country along with global citizens, need to understand the essence of non-violence and its application for mass development.

Keywords: Non-violence; Contemporary; Dilemma; Peace; Resilience; Conflict; Justice.

Introduction

The present global state of affairs is a blend of both favorable and unfavorable consequences. To establish an equivalent disposition, the philosophy of non-violence or *ahimsa* embraced by Mahatma Gandhi esteemed to be profound. As Gandhi is a philosopher who envisioned lives of action or pragmatic approach, he always yearned for effective transformation of this world, not to only understand in a cognitive way. His philosophical ideas are determined by four pillars, one of which is non-violence. This non-violence is not an act of cowards; in fact, it is an active force deeply rooted in truth. The idealist Gandhian philosophy aims to elevate universal values which are necessary for humankind and all other

creatures of the world. Apart from this, some contemporary instances are aimed to be discussed in this paper relevant with this context.

Objectives of the study

The primary objectives of the study are:

1. To gain familiarity with Gandhian philosophy in the global forum.
2. To explore the fundamental principle of Gandhian philosophy; Non-violence.
3. To examine the relevance of Gandhian Non-violence principle whether it is a dilemma or resilience with special reference to contemporary burning issues within India.

Methodology

The role of Methodology is vital in research. Methodology adopted for the preparation of this paper is qualitatively analytic and descriptive method. It can also be regarded as applied research as the application of non-violence is significant in resolving current affairs. Primarily the data have been collected from various books related to Mahatma Gandhi's Socio-political philosophy emphasizing on our core element Non-violence for the research paper. Secondly, various interpretations regarding this topic have been collected from articles written on journals contributed by renounced scholars and authors on the topic so that the research paper is to be an authentic one.

Significance of the study

The contemporary world politics is diplomatic in nature both internally and externally. In this vast world to establish peace and harmony we must prefer non-violence over violence. Likewise, the charismatic leader Mahatma Gandhi of great India adopted this non-violence as a means inspired from Jaina and Buddha philosophy in supervising the struggle for freedom which led to independence from British dominance. In today also his method brings us hope and infuse confidence in justice to deal with any kind barriers peacefully. But somehow his views are inconsistent and contradictory, which is still a matter of debate. Thus, we need a thorough discussion on whether it has any practical relevance in present context, or it is only a theoretical approach with some proper reflective cases. As all these aspects have been reviewed in this paper, thus it is a significant study.

Review of literature

The primary works that have been used for this paper are as follows:

Firstly, *The Story of my Experiments with Truth*, authored by Gandhi himself, highlights the unique contributions by exploration of his lifelong quest for truth. This book is very useful as it consists of detailed analysis of the major thoughts or ideas related to his philosophy including our primary element of discussion non-violence that shaped independence of India. It is also marked by his journey to spiritual evolution.

Secondly, we have used another book written by Mahatma Gandhi entitled as *Satyagraha in South Africa*. This book provides discussion on Satyagraha or non-violence struggle against racial discrimination over Indians in South Africa. It also impacted on global movements.

Thirdly, *The Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi* and *The Chief Currents of Contemporary Philosophy*, is furnished with Mahatma Gandhi's socio-political interpretations where Gandhi transformed love of the fleshed into the love of the spirit. In addition, it focuses on the evolution and application of his core norms satyagraha and ahimsa. These books are penned by Dharendra Mohan Dutta.

Fourthly, Raghavan N. Iyer's eminent work, *The Moral and Political thought of Mahatma Gandhi*, can be considered as worthwhile to understanding Gandhi's ideas. As in this book the author elucidated the central concepts of Gandhian philosophy with special reference to moral as well as political context, we have found it very useful for our paper.

Fifthly, Todd May's work *Non-violent Resistance: A Philosophical Introduction* deals within depth philosophical analysis of non-violence along with its implications and discusses it with the examples of Gandhi and other advocates of Non-violent resistance.

Sixthly, *Gandhi and Beyond: Non-violence for a New Political Age* by David Cortright examines the contemporary relevance of this Gandhian principle with its pragmatic applicability related to global issues.

Furthermore, we have gone through some other books and articles related to the topic and gathered many points from those which helped me to construct this work in this way.

A glimpse of Gandhian philosophy

As our paper deals with primarily non-violence, hence we need to have a clear vision of Gandhian philosophy first. To define a philosophy

within some words is not an easy task. But simply we can understand Gandhian philosophy as the religious and social ideas adopted and developed by Mohandas Karamdas Gandhi initiated during his period in South Africa from 1983 to 1914 and later in India of course. His ideas have been further developed by later Gandhians most notably in India by Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayana. In international domain, we can mention the name of Martin Luther King Jr. in this light. Gandhi thoughts carry on it the stamp of a number of influences starting from ancient Hindu tradition to Jaina, Buddha literatures. These studies sharpened his moral sense and religious insight. Besides these, Raichand Bhai, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Tolstoy, John Ruskin influenced him very much.

With his unique experiences of South African moral and political adventures, he came back to India with a determination of making efforts in achieving independence through the technique of satyagraha foundation of which is truth and non-violence. His vision for India's future was highly unorthodox. He always dreamt of a nation consisting of self-rule or swaraj. As human nature is naturally virtuous, all individuals are believed to be capable of high moral development and of reform. Although there are elements of unity in Gandhi's thought, they are not reduced to a system. It is a set of beliefs and principles applicable in accordance with the historical and settings that implies absence of dogmatism.

Gandhian philosophy is certainly considered as a universal and timeless philosophy, which holds ideals of truth and non-violence relevant to all humankind. The core objective of Gandhian philosophy is to transform the individual and society simultaneously in accordance with the principles of truth and non-violence. The related central concepts are Sarvodaya, the welfare of all without exception and satyagraha, the tool of non-violent actions. The foundation of the Gandhian non-violent social order is religious or spiritual, economic and political questions -are seen from the moral or humanistic perspective. In essence his philosophy is not at all a new concept, it is rooted in ancient Indian and western culture harnessing eternal and universal moral and religious principles. He himself said that he had nothing new to teach the world and truth and non-violence are as old as hills. So far, we have an idea on Gandhian philosophy. In the next part we will discuss the notion of non-violence in the light of his philosophical thoughts.

The concept of non-violence in Gandhian philosophy

It is significant that from Gandhi's vision we can see the reflection of truth and non-violence as the two sides of the same coin that affect the way

of life. Technically he was not the pioneer of *ahimsa* but the way he used *ahimsa* to solve narrower to broader issues - this makes him different from other figures. He not only wanted establishment of peace, but he worked for it. He thought moral crisis to be the prime source of human sufferings which influences one to act without honesty.

In earlier Indian tradition, Ahimsa was associated with spiritual discipline. But Gandhiji transformed it into social context. He found out non-violence to be the law of life which is greater than any kind of destruction. It can make life worth living by constructive, well-ordered human society with law of love. It is not mechanical by nature. There is no doubt that law of love is there in every human heart, but the one who utilize it in his life must be appreciated as it is the most active force in the world. Generally, men are not aware of this divine power and hence arises the strive to achieve by the way of non-violence. If not, there will be no distinguishing mark between himself and the barbarian. He believed that through the practice of law of love there will be bliss on this earth.

He used the term non-violence in order to bring out the true meaning of *ahimsa*. The term 'non' does not imply any negative force. To Gandhi, it goes beyond its literal meaning. It has both positive (non-killing, non-injury etc.) and negative aspect (performing virtuous acts). In its positive aspect it is nothing but love, a kind of feeling of oneness. Out of which, positive aspect is said to be the fundamental one due to its representation of its essence by comprehending its negative aspect. It is a superior force which can surpass all the forces and can put together all other forces. This demands a sincere effort to demolish feelings like anger, revenge, hatred, jealousy etc. as these are the obstacles in the path of non-violence. The one who cleanses one's inner life from unwanted feelings and comprehends the noble feelings of benevolence, compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, kindness, sympathy etc. can perform non-violent actions. Thus, it meant for the strong not for the weak. But it is to be noted that it is opposite of cowardice. Violets are better than cowards because a violent man can become a non-violent practitioner, but a coward can never become like that. He regarded violence as the expression of weakness born out of fear. Thus, to follow non-violence we need to conquer fear from our inner mind. The capability of dying for others is the true sense of strength not to kill someone. Therefore, non-violence is the weapon of the bravest. It has the power to convert an enemy into a friend. For Gandhi, *ahimsa* can be truly observed by one who does not hold anything as his own and follows a spirit of detachment. This is the brief concept of non-violence put forwarded by Mahatma Gandhi, practical relevance of which we are going to discuss in the next segment with some contemporary burning issues.

Discussion on social justice via non-violence of Gandhi to resolve contemporary issues

Gandhiji does not consider non-violence as a mere philosophical principle. Instead, it has great practical value to him. This concept of non-violence and non-violent resistance has a long history in Indian thoughts in the context related to rivalry among different religions. At present also it has great relevance globally. When we discuss Social Justice, it refers to fairness in simple manner. But when we study Gandhian social justice, it covers some other principles as well. Gandhi's social justice is closely related with philosophy of non-violence and the way in which he wants to acquire it is known as satyagraha. It is an integral form of non-violent tool to fight against injustice. Etymologically it implies truth force, that has the ability to transform a society's self-realization of patience, compassion and self-suffering.

We are all aware that how Gandhiji used non-violence as the pillar of strength to deal with each and every socio-political issue in a democratic way example of which are Swadeshi Movement of 1918, Salt March of 1930, Quit India Movement of 1942 etc. that brings us independence from dominance of British. We can find numbers of articles or theses on his contribution. But our aim of this paper is not to only highlight his thoughts, but to discuss its pragmatic values to deal with social justice with special reference to contemporary India. After Gandhi, non-violence has been used by other influential figures like Jayprakash Narayan, Medha Patkar, Anna Hazare, Vinoba Bhave, Nirbhaya case, most recently Sonam Wangchuk. In between these also some other protests are there but these are most important. *Firstly*, in 1974, the Total Revolution of Jayprakash Narayan aimed at comprehensive social change rooted in peaceful, non-violent means. The result of it was not satisfactory as it was unable to achieve its goal, but it impacted on political ground. *Secondly*, during 2011, Anna Hazare and his followers started hunger strike, which is a democratic non-violent way of protest against corruption and for farmer's issues. He got immense support from all over the country for his Anti-corruption Movement. Due to this non-violent way of protesting who did not break any rules, government was pressurized to form a committee consisting of both government and civil society representatives, and the parliament passed in the year 2013, the Jan Lokpal Bill to investigate corruption cases against any government officials, that includes Prime Minister of the country too. It took nationwide attention as it was followed by democratic values yet in a most civilized way without violent acts. *Thirdly*, The Nirbhaya case of 2012

of a Delhi student brutal gang rape is well known to all. For the justice of Nirbhaya people fought non-violently by candle march and other peaceful ways. The legal battle lasted for many years and finally the convicted four people were hanged in 2020. During this battle thousands of people protested for women's safety and demanded the criminal law act so that no criminal can be exempted from punishment related to women's safety. In result of this the family of Nirbhaya got justice. *Fourthly*, after covid-19 pandemic, a prolonged farmer protest was started in 2020 and lasted for months. It was the most significant non-violent protest against the three major laws passed by Indian govt. Thousands of farmers especially from Haryana, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh marched towards Delhi with their tractors. The unity of farmers gained support globally. It was fully non-violent; they use social media and other peaceful tactics without any violence and that is why it is significant but around 700 farmers lost their valuable lives fighting against the laws. In result of this protest the law was repealed. *Fifthly* and one of the most contemporary cases is Sonam Wangchuk and people of Ladakh protest. At present, October 2025, is a very important case which must need to be highlighted. Actually, it is an ongoing protest since 2021. Sonam Wangchuk, who is an eminent innovator and educationist, his fellow protestors were on a hunger strike demanding constitutional safeguards of Ladakh in the form of statehood and its inclusion in the sixth schedule of the constitution for the sake of protection of the ecosystem of this place. It was fully inspired by the Gandhian principle of non-violence. But during his hunger strike he was detained without any formal detention order and charged under the National security Act. The consequence of this protest is yet to be achieved as it is still going on. But the entire protest was as we have mentioned based on Gandhian ideals. In later it took some violent actions but there is a doubt if it was real protestors or some government agents, so that they can use it against them. It is yet to be proved legally. We have faith in our Judiciary and justice will be definitely served. The Central Government is undoubtedly using their power in this case. The voice of citizens should be given importance by the government. Their duty is to solve the issues with proper analysis and discussion not to suppress their voice and imprison people in accordance with their willingness. It is not a good sign for a democratic nation. If a government does not allow people to speak or express their feelings in a peaceful manner of course, then how can a nation be developed? Thus, most of the people feel that just like other professions, we need to follow some criteria of intellectual qualification in politics also for the betterment of our society. So, these are some contemporary issues that reflect the importance of non-violent norm of Gandhi. Other than this, internationally

we can mention the name of Nelson Mandela from South Africa and Martin Luther.

Dilemma or resilience of non-violence of Gandhi

Now there may be a question arises whether the Gandhian approach towards non-violence a dilemma or resilience in modern era is. It is a controversial topic of discussion. We can't answer it in just one word as it depends on the situation. But an intellectual can deal with it if it works as a dilemma. For this we need ability of reasoning. We know that violence is not greeted in Gandhian principle but if our soldiers started to think like that what would happen to us? It is a dilemma between doing your duty and following your norms of life. We simply want to enlighten that in some circumstances we assumed it to be a dilemma. But there should not be any dilemma in this regard. A Soldier can't think of their defense to be violence during his duty. It is their duty to protect the nation.

We should remember that during war who is fighting for your nation as their duty. If some day they lost their lives who would suffer -the decision maker of the war or their family? If you can't stop a warlike situation with your intelligence, your capability must be questioned, the government must be questioned, and it is not anti-nationalist. For the development of intellectuality, people need to acquire proper education, skills, scholarships not some unnecessary beneficiary which is only rising debt rate of a country. In 1863, during Gettysburg Address, Abraham Lincoln said, '*Democracy is of the people, by the people and for the people.*' We generally see other aspects of democracy except 'for the people'. Political leaders are our representatives who should work for the welfare of the people in a nation not to grow personal account balances, multiple companies etc.

Again, when we use the term resilience in this context, we mean that non-violence is a powerful way for demonstrating resilience in terms of conflicts, oppression and other societal diseases. It works as an empowerment of humankind. It aims at transformation; it does not promote winner-loser game with opponent. It is thus a sustainable method of resilience. This non-violence is a perfect reply to violence and injustice. To follow it one must have qualities like courage, discipline, patience within himself. To tackle injustice in broader sense we can follow it with some legal actions. For instance, if we have any kind of disagreement regarding a law, we should take an action legally at first then other peaceful acts of protest. But if we are hunger striking for days, we might die. But for the establishment of peace, one needs to work on it, it does not demand dead

bodies or health deterioration. Hence, we should prefer appeal of legal action which is also a non-violent strategy over it.

In essence, we want to assert that presence of dilemma in performing non-violence can be removed by intellectual reasoning and it can be called as a resilience also. But to strengthen its position we require some legal steps as per needs.

Conclusion

To conclude our paper, we assert that Gandhian non-violence is a revolutionary concept yet in a most dignified way which is still relevant today to deal with whether injustice or violence. It remains contrast to constitutional and extremist methods of political mobilization of present dirty politics. These are highly recommendable for social change as it is not leading us to self- destruction as opposite to violence. It is a basic sense that if you start violence, the consequence of the action will also be violence because at present time everyone is yearning for equality. If somebody attacks you then the opponent will not offer you their head to attack. If you avoid violence from your side at least we can expect to stop violence there though people in real life lacks moral values. The world is already in the turmoil of violence, if we follow violence to get our rights or other constructive developments it will be adding fuel to it nothing else. You can't expect nonviolent treatment from others while behaving violently with others. First one needs to follow by themselves. It implies his pragmatic view towards society. It also helps us in confronting contemporary issues. This cruel world that made by us needs to realize that to show our own power we need not to take violence as the medium. It only results in destruction and here we can mention the outcomes of both the world wars. It is not that this approach is fully satisfied by all people. There is need to reform some points but one can't deny the importance of it at present times. There is a beautiful thought of Austrian writer Von Ebner-Eschenbach that a dead clock provides us correct time twice a day. Like that no principles are useless completely. It helps us either by positively or sometime criticizing which can be reformed. We need to execute the Gandhian thoughts which are relevant with present context in content and spirit in our best possible way. His courage, conviction, dedication to truth, justice, non-violence and most significantly enormous confidence in humanities is truly commendable and for the establishment of sustainable peace we need his kind of approach to non-violence.

Notes

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