

Original Article

Relevance of the Gandhian Concepts of Non-violence and Satyagraha

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Mahatma Gandhi occupies a special place in the history of the world not only because he led the freedom movement of India against the colonial rule but also because of his extraordinary ways and vision for the transformation of mankind. He showed the peaceful and right path to the ailing humanity and gave voice to the oppressed, the weak and the downtrodden. Transformation of the inner self forms the basic foundation of the Gandhian philosophy. Non violence and Satyagraha are not only weapons in the fight against evil and unjust forces, but they carry a deep message for reformation and restoration of humanity. The present research article aims at exploring the core of Gandhian concepts of non violence and Satyagraha and their relevance in the modern world.

Key words : Satyagraha, non violence, reformation, inner self.

Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi is considered to be one of the greatest leaders, thinkers, and philosophers of the 20th-century India and the world. A major part of the century is colored with his influence. Soon after his return to India in 1915 from South Africa, Mahatma Gandhi began to show his intentions aimed at changing the fate of his fellow countrymen. The years he had spent in South Africa had shown him the true face of the colonialism. His personal experiences in a foreign land had toughened his willpower to fight against the colonial evils. He had great vision and unstoppable desire to change the odd circumstances at every level. The freedom from colonial rule was his prime goal but not the ultimate one. He wanted to free the Indians from the clutches of fear, poverty, inequality, ignorance and from all the evils that he thought to be the hurdles blocking the path to a real, happy and enlightened life. He wanted to revolutionize every aspect of human life. But in order to bring about this revolution, Gandhi Ji created his own path and set his own milestones for his fellow countrymen to follow and a great journey began that made Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the Mahatma, Baapu and Father of Nation. Gandhism refers to the collection of Gandhi's thoughts, principles, ideas and ideals. Although his thoughts and ideas were neither quite new ones nor were just solely created by him. For example, his popular principle of non-violence was taught thousands of years ago by Mahatma Buddha and Vardhman Mahavir. But, use of non-violence as a weapon in the battle of freedom against the most powerful colonial regime of the time made Mahatma Gandhi different. His ideas on Truth, Non-violence, and Satyagraha defined and shaped the very nature of the Indian national movement.

India won freedom and Gandhism became the guiding spirit of the nation in her journey towards attainment of perfection in every sphere of life and the torchlight for the people of India in their mission of victory over evils of all kinds and sorts. Not only in India, Gandhi became an inspiration for the whole world, especially for the weaker, the oppressed and the enslaved. Gandhi has significant relevance especially where there is injustice, inequality and urgency for hope against despair.



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Gandhian Theory of Non-Violence:

Gandhiji was a profound advocate of Non-Violence. Truth and Non-Violence formed the very core of Gandhism. It is believed that Gandhiji was highly influenced with the teachings of Vardhamana Mahavira, especially with his theory of non-violence. Gandhian concept of non-violence is not limited to physical violence only, but it extends to mental and spiritual levels as well. It is not just preventing oneself from committing violent acts, but is a positive and active force to inculcate courage and strength. It is not a passive idea that demands an individual only to refrain from violence but an active inner force full of vitality, love and compassion. It is not just absence of physical harm to others, but it consists of a love and goodwill for all beings.

Key Aspects of Non-Violence:

The Gandhian doctrine of Non-Violence has two aspects:

- (a) Negative Non-violence: It involves a complete negation of violence against any being. It forbids any kind of physical harm to others. Man is a complex collection of varied sentiments—love, affection, mercy, compassion, empathy, sympathy as well as anger, lust, hatred, cruelty and revenge. It is the negative sentiments that tend to dominate his behavior and ultimately force him to indulge in violent acts. Mahatma Gandhi believes this inner evil to be the main culprit behind the wide-spread violence in the world. As a spiritual guide, Mahatma Gandhi warns the humanity against lust, anger and hatred of any kind and type and forbids any kind of violence or harming others.

- (b) Positive Non-Violence:

Mahatma Gandhi's theory of non-violence needs to be understood completely only with the help of its positive aspect. Gandhi Ji wants us to replace the negativity of our minds with positivity; anger, lust and hatred with love, compassion and mercy. He preaches for global brotherhood, a world full of harmony, humanity and goodness. It was Gandhian way to get rid of evils and to make this world a place worth-living. Violence has long been an ailment, a highly painful wound of the human civilization which has often put a question mark on the forehead of "humanity" and/or "civilization" itself. Even in modern era, in the 21st century, the wide-spread violence in various parts of the world testify the validity of Gandhian emphasis on non-violence. Even today, the ultimate solution of violence seems to be the replacement of negativity with positivity and evil with goodness.

Characteristics of Gandhian principle of non-violence:

1) Active non-violence:

According to Mahatma Gandhi, it is the awaken non-violence, followed by the mighty who have the strength and courage to apply their powers and use their physical might against their enemies. They CAN but they choose NOT to indulge in any kind and sort of violence. Their non-violence is that of the brave, the mighty when they practice it in their lives. It is a conscious and proactive choice, not born of necessity or compulsion. That is why Gandhi Ji believes that it is the best kind of non-violence as it is based on courage, strength and compassion. The brave choose it only because of their noble and high values and thoughts. It is a symbol of the dominance of high and noble values over the beastly physical powers that prevent the powerful from causing any harm to the others.

Passive Non-Violence:

Gandhi Ji believed that non-violence is meant for the brave and powerful people, not for the cowards. The principle of non-violence has no relations with cowardice as they are contrary to each other. If a person follows the noble principle of non-violence only out of the fear because he is afraid of the opponent, it can never be termed as non-violence; it is passive violence. Gandhi Ji strongly condemns it.

Satyagraha and Passive Resistance:

Mahatma Gandhi coined the term Satyagraha or holding firmly to the truth for his philosophical idea of non-violent resistance against the injustices caused by the colonial regime in India. The philosophy of Satyagraha holds a high place in Gandhian ideology. A practitioner of Satyagraha utilizes the immense powers of truth to appeal to the conscience of the opponent and tries with the firm moral strength and peaceful way to convince the latter that his actions are unjust and wrong. It is a moral force that seeks to convert the opponent from wrong path to the right one, from unjust ways to just ways.

Satyagraha was one of the most powerful weapons used by Mahatma Gandhi in the National Movement of India against the powerful British Empire. The concept of Satyagraha is based on the assumption that the good nature of man ultimately prevails. One can successfully awaken this goodness in opponent's heart with the help of his love-force i.e. Satyagraha. Gandhiji resisted the foreign rule, their atrocities and their injustices through non-violent means.

The first nationwide movement against the British rule in 1920 was based on non-cooperation. Gandhi Ji advised his fellow citizens not to co-operate with the British government in any way. The second one, Civil Disobedience movement was based on politely disobeying the foreign govt. Both non-cooperation and civil disobedience are ingredients of Satyagraha. Both the movements gained wide success and popularity and significantly exhibited the cause of the Indians. The absence of violence of any kind was a prominent feature of both the movements. How deeply non-violence was rooted in the Gandhian philosophy is evident with a single example of violence at Chauri Chaura in 1922 during Non-cooperation movement that shook Gandhi's conscience so strongly that he halted the so far successful and popular movement in no time. Clearly, violence has no place in Gandhian philosophy. Violence of any kind, in actions, in words, in thoughts—nothing is acceptable. Hatred or anger, lust or ill-will, all are denied. Only "selfless

love, love for humanity" is given significance. Gandhian concepts of Non-violence and Satyagraha aim at making a man a perfect human being from inside who can resist any kind of injustice with the help of his inner force, the force of love.

Relevance of Non Violence and Satyagraha in the 21st Century World

Firstly, Gandhi wants to change the inner side of a man's soul and conscience. He wants to purify his inner self by replacing negativity with positivity and demonic ideas with human ideals. Then he wants him to utilize his positive inner force in social reforms and resistance of any kind of evil or injustice in public life. Therefore, Gandhi's concepts of non-violence and Satyagraha are not merely philosophical or theoretical ideals; they hold strong practical values for the transformation of man and resistance of evil and injustice beyond the limitations of time and place. The Gandhian concepts of Non violence and Satyagraha had a great impact in the 20th century world. Mahatma Gandhi successfully applied these concepts in the national movement of India and showed a path to the ailing humanity in its struggle against all kinds of injustice and atrocities during the violent era of colonialism and world wars. Gandhi's fight in India was not against an ordinary power but against the super power of the contemporary world. Mahatma Gandhi was a visionary who could see the futility of violent means and its painful outcomes for humanity. Therefore, he proposed an alternative path, the path of non violence and satyagraha, to transform the inner self of the opponent and achieve the desired legitimate goals. Mahatma Gandhi became an ideal for humanity. His vision crossed the boundaries of the nations. His ideology became the inspiration for the victims of colonialism and injustice.

The 21st century world is no doubt, a different world in many ways. Old challenges have been replaced by new ones. Colonialism is no more in its body, though it survives in its spirit. Global politics has changed a lot. But the eternal enemy of humanity remains the same; wars and violence continues to strangle the windpipe of humanity. Widespread terrorism in many parts of the world, violence in the name of religion, caste and creed, corruption and manipulation of resources, all indicate a lack of the sense of coexistence and tolerance. Several nations are hostile to one another and are constantly engaged in harming the interests of the other nations. The end of the cold war brought hopes for a long lasting peace and harmony in the world which unfortunately proved to be just a mirage. Wars again became a common event in the modern world. Gulf war, Afghanistan war, Russia - Ukraine war, America- Israel and Iran war are examples of global politics turning violent. Violence has become a new normal in the modern world. The United Nations Security Council is fast losing its significance in maintaining global peace and order. Principles of international relations, peaceful coexistence and human rights have no meaning or significance for the powerful nations who leave no stone unturned to achieve their national interests. Global peace and harmony is no more a matter of concern for the highly ambitious powers of the world.

Popular voices and demands for rights and freedoms also face threat in many regions of the world. Regimes in many countries suppress the democratic and free voices with aggression and try to stop them violently. Democracy is at stake in various regions of the world. Hereditary regimes and dictatorships still survive in many countries where people have no rights and freedoms. The autocratic forces are opposed to popular demands and people have no say in the working of such autocratic regimes. Oppression of women and denial of their freedoms and rights is not an exception. Ethnic and racial clashes tear the very fabric of coexistence in many parts of the world. Religious differences also pose a great threat to peace and harmony.

In this way, the 21st century world is no different from that of the 20th century. In the global scenario, the Gandhian philosophy of truth and non-violence still holds great significance for the suffering humanity. To Gandhi, non violence is a way of life. If the global leaders and stakeholders of human societies pay heed to Mahatma Gandhi, it can bring a great change in the gloomy circumstances of the contemporary world. Race, religion or ethnicity no doubt show differences but they neither oppose the basic ideas of humanity nor do they support any kind of violence. Any kind of violent actions arise out of the wicked ideas of dominance and hegemony in the minds of the greedy stakeholders. Gandhi knew this truth and that is why he talked about global peace and brotherhood by transforming the conscience of man. To him, violence can never be an option in any circumstances. India was under colonial rule and facing major problems in the war torn first half of the 20th century. The Indian people faced aggression and atrocities but Gandhi didn't provoke the people to be violent. He fought back with the weapons of non-violence and satyagraha successfully. He believed in the transformation of the conscience of the people. Gandhi was relevant in the 20th century and Gandhi is relevant in the 21st century world as his philosophy of Non violence and Satyagraha has the potential to guide mankind to a better life and peaceful coexistence.

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