

ABSTRACT

AHIMSĀ AND SATYĀGRAHA:
THEORY AND PRACTICE IN POST GANDHIAN
ERA

***ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS SUBMITTED TO ASSAM
UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN THE DEPARTMENT OF
PHILOSOPHY***

By

MONJU CHUTIA

Ph.D. Registration No. Ph.D/1385/2010 dated 17.09.2010



DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
SARVEPALLI RADHAKRISHNAN SCHOOL OF
PHILOSOPHY
ASSAM UNIVERSITY
SILCHAR-788011, INDIA
2015

Abstract

Objectives of the Research

This research has the following objectives.

1. To study the prevalent theories on *ahimsā* and *satyāgraha* before Gandhi
2. To critically evaluate the understanding of Gandhi on *ahimsā* and *satyāgraha*.
3. To find out the apparent changes which have come in the theory and practice of *ahimsā* and *Satyāgraha* in post Gandhian Era.
4. To study the challenges to *ahimsā* and *Satyāgraha* in the modern times.

Organisation of Chapters

The research work is organized in to six chapters.

Chapter - I Introduction

Chapter - II Different theories on *ahimsā* and *Satyāgraha* before Gandhi

Chapter - III Gandhi's understanding of *ahimsā* and *Satyāgraha*

Chapter - IV Influence of Gandhi on the leading thinkers of 21st century

Chapter -V Theory and practice of *ahimsā* and *Satyāgraha* in

Socio-political transformative movements across the world

Chapter - VI Conclusion

Gandhi's philosophy of *ahimsā* and *satyāgraha* are based on certain metaphysical presuppositions. There is no denying the fact that Gandhi's life and thought was remarkably influenced by *Vedānta* philosophy, in particular *Advaita Vedānta*. Undifferentiated consciousness as the material and efficient cause of the world is the basic idea behind the theory of 'oneness of life'. Gandhi's metaphysical presuppositions included a firm belief in the existence of God, original goodness of human being, human perfectibility etc.

Gandhi's philosophy may be categorized as 'transformative metaphysics'. This has both the elements of 'descriptive metaphysics' and 'speculative metaphysics' and is much more than these. This kind of a metaphysics brings a new dimension to experience, defines and changes a human beings relation with society and has major influence on content and structure of existential consciousness. Richard Rorty and P. Strawson have elaborately discussed descriptive and revisionary models of metaphysics.

This present research after a through study of Gandhi's understanding of *ahimsā* and *satyāgraha*, tries to locate the matrix of multidimensional variations in the principle of non-violence and *satyāgraha* while negotiating socio-political transformative movements. This is the core objective of my research. I have tried to map the conceptual variations in the principles of *ahimsā* and *satyāgraha* from the thinking of Martin Luther King Jr., Aung San Suu Kyi and Dalai Lama. I have also tried to locate some of the socio-political transformative movements across the world which are based on Gandhi's philosophy.

Transformative metaphysics takes care of descriptive and revisionary metaphysics, yet it transcends both of them. Gandhian metaphysics does not fall

under any of these two models. Though his ideas and metaphysical presuppositions belong to both these categories, it is better to categorize his thought as transformative metaphysics. It is revisionary because it affirms that Brahman is beyond linguistic expression beyond reason and beyond sense perception. The Absolute is beyond categories of intellect. It is also descriptive since Gandhi's philosophy depended mostly on texts like the *Bhagvad Gītā* and the *Upaniṣads*. The scriptural statements were analyzed to grasp their meaning. It is better to classify Gandhi's philosophy under transformative metaphysics following the 'Advaita model'. Gandhi was a practical idealist he believed in idealism but was rooted to practice the principles in everyday life.

We the human beings all expect peace. Non-violence is an essential element to establish a peaceful mind, peaceful society and peaceful world. Though Martin Luther, Aung San Suu Kyi and the Dalai Lama employed non-violent methods in a different way but the relative truth is that the aim of all of them is to formulate a peaceful society, a peaceful life in the end.

The major purpose of this research is to see the various changes in the concepts of non-violence and *satyāgraha* from Gandhian to post Gandhian Era. In the pre Gandhian period, we have looked at the different traditional Indian philosophical school's of thought as well as western socio-philosophical thinkers ideas and their philosophical arguments on non-violence. After elucidating pre Gandhian period, we have looked after the Gandhi's thoughts and contribution to non-violence and *satyāgraha*. Gandhi has brought up a new dimension of transformative thought in non-violence which helped to change the British dominant mindset on colonial India, where he has used non-violence as a method. The major focus of this work was to see three major post Gandhian

thinker's ideas and their contributions to reform socio-political discrimination. Here the study is to see the major conceptual changes in non-violence and *satyāgraha* in the 21st century and how they adopt it in their socio-political movements.

The crux of the neo-liberalism is modern economic policy which refers 'the priority of the price mechanism, the free enterprise, the system of competition and a strong and impartial state'. It is associated with *laissez-faire* economic liberalism beginning in the 1970s and 1980s after the social liberalism movement in Britain for economic reformation. The question arising here that why am I talking about neo-liberalism? The neo-liberalism is the economic reformation of the theory of liberalism where in the main objective is to reform the economic system in modern society. Hence, the ideas of non-violence and *satyāgrah* are also bringing a new transformative movement in modern society which I indicate here as neo socio-political liberalism.

From the whole discussion, we have reached at four major points: 1) spiritual and metaphysical orientation: it is adequately identical with Gandhi's model of transformative metaphysical philosophy which Gandhi has borrowed from *Advaita* philosophy. Gandhi has been redefining an individual's relation with society, bring true religion into politics and has a set of metaphysical presuppositions such as a. God alone is real b. human beings are by nature non-violent c. the perfectibility of human nature etc. 2) *Ahimsā* as creed and policy: Gandhi wished to propagate *ahimsā* as a creed, yet as a politician, he also tried to justify it as a policy because he used it as socio-political tool. 3) *Satyāgraha* and the method: Gandhi and his followers especially Martin Luther King, Aung San Suu Kyi and Dalai Lama were using *satyāgraha* as a method to reform

socio-political problems in the 21st century. They use it as a way to practice non-violence in their practical life. 4) Non-violence has been transforming into neo socio-political liberalism in the practice of 21st century thinkers. Martin Luther King Jr. has used the same principles against racial discrimination in bringing equality as a fundamental human right for his people. Dalai Lama has been peacefully fighting for political freedom in Tibet and Aung San Suu Kyi is fighting to bring political reformation and human rights in Myanmar. The aim of non-violent strategies is the search for social equity. It is the leading transformation of non-violence and *satyāgraha* after Gandhi's transformative metaphysics.