

CHAPTER-III

**GANDHI'S UNDERSTANDING OF *AHIMSĀ* AND
*SATYĀGRAHA***

What are the two major principles that rank highest among Gandhi's philosophical approach to social relations? We can answer it in just two words: *Ahimsā* and *Satyāgraha*. In fact, for the first time in history, Gandhi added a new dimension to *ahimsā* in theory and practice. He established non-violence as a means that could be most effective in the political sphere. He expected that the whole world and its people should apply *ahimsā* in their behaviour, so that they can ensure their personal freedom and at the same time secure freedom for all. Jainism and Buddhism were the most important influences that laid the foundation of Gandhi's non-violence theory. Gandhi's theory of non-violence was based not just on theological but also on more pragmatic considerations. Non-violence is an intensely active force when properly understood and used. A violent man's activity is most visible while it lasts, but it is always transitory. The fact is that non-violence does not work in the same way as violence.

Gandhi had made it clear that Truth has greater importance in life than non-violence. Even in strife and unusual circumstances Truth prevails. But non-violence may not be accepted by every individual and in all circumstances. Non-violence is the means and Truth is the end. Gandhi's conception of *Satyāgraha* is based on his explanation of truth. In spite of certain limitations of non-violence, we cannot deny the importance of it. It helps man in bringing about a democratic pattern of behaviour. Non-violence represents mutual adjustment, social coordination and socio-mental co-relation. *Satyāgraha* is a kind of method through which we can realize the highest form of truth. A votary of truth who ultimately seeks to realize God (the highest reality) should always be selfless.

In our individual daily life conflicts and violence have become unending that threaten the very existence of civilized life. The worst diseases of the modern society are love of wealth and love of power. Violence always leads to counter violence and cannot be a lasting solution to any conflict. However, Gandhi accused the British rule of being particularly dreadful. His non-violence was used in conjunction with the values of non-attachment. Gandhi declared the two goals, *ahimsā* and *satyāgraha* of his life would ensure India's freedom which could be achieved through non-violence. One without the other would be unacceptable and weakening. Gandhi believed that violence can never be a solution to India's problem. To humiliate the opponent into submission was a unique feature of Gandhi's political ideology of non-violence.

By *satyāgraha*, Gandhi means the strength that comes from adhering to truth. Gandhi believed that a truthful person can't long remain violent. Indeed, he said that 'lying is the mother of violence'. He ranked truthfulness more important than peacefulness. *Ahimsā* and *Satyāgraha* are inter related concepts. If someone believes in and practises *satyāgraha*, he must always be open to finding the truth. While Gandhi believed that there is truth, he could not be certain that he was right, in that cases Gandhi insisted that if a person can't know the absolute truth then he is unqualified to punish others. Gandhi strongly believed that 'Truth is God' and there is no way to find Truth except through non-violence.¹ Violence is a product of destruction, dishonesty and falsehood. He said "the more truthful we are, the nearer we are to God."² His *satyāgraha* is an instrument of social change which ensures justice and freedom.

When Gandhi was 15years old he removed a bit of gold from his brother's armlet to clear a small debt of the latter. He felt so ashamed about his act and

wrote a letter to his father to confess about the matter. His father's forgiveness was granted to him in the form of silent tears. It left a long-term mark and an object-lesson to him in the power of *ahimsā*.

However, Gandhi insisted that if he changed his mind or felt to contradict an earlier statement, it was always in regard to his unyielding pursuit of truth. On that score, Gandhi never hesitated. In fact, if Gandhi later discovered that a position he held from his early years was no longer reliable with his understanding of what truth was, he would not hesitate to change his position to rectify what he then thought was the truth. In response to his critics, Gandhi said, "My aim is not to be consistent with my earlier statements on a given question, but to be consistent with truth as it may present itself to me at a given moment."³

Gandhi was a well known politician capable of masterful strategic and tactical thinking in the political field. First and foremost he was a religious man devoted to spiritual growth and the search for God. Gandhi said that politics can't be separated from religion. The politics that separated from religion was like a corpse only fit to be buried. Gandhi insisted that he entered politics because he was so deeply religious and sought to spiritualize political life and political institutions. He even said that although he could live without food, he could not live without prayer, because prayer purified his heart each day.⁴

Gandhi accepted and considered all religions as essential truths. His emphasis on combining religion and politics was taken by many Muslims as an attempt to impose his own faith on the Muslim minority. Though Gandhi went to great lengths to moderate these concerns, his emphasis on mixing religion

and politics helped inflame the fears of India's religious minorities who were worried at such public displays of Hindu worship in Indian politics. Gandhi also led public prayers from other religions as well. Many Indians were too fearful and ignorant of his religious approach to politics.

3.1. The Main Principles of Gandhi's Non-violent Philosophy

3.1.1. *Ahimsā*

Himsā is a Sanskrit word that means harm, injury or violence. Thus *Ahimsā* means non-harm, non-injury or non-violence. Gandhi translates *ahimsā* into something more than abstaining from committing harm or violence. "Rather, *ahimsā* carries with it a positive, life-affirming connotation that calls for action based not just on the refusal to do harm, but also on the notion of doing good, even to a evildoer."⁵ *Ahimsā* involves conduct based on the renunciation of the will to hurt or to damage. It also encourages and benefits others through loving and peaceful works. *Ahimsā* therefore, is more than the absence of violence. Nonviolence appeals not to the intellect, it penetrates the heart it is the affirmation of peace, love and justice. Very often violence is transient. The change brought about by non-violence will be lasting and durable only by proper training of non-violent means which aim restore to the wrongs.

The capacity of sacrifice develops fearlessness in the heart of non violent individual. He is ever prepared to sacrifice his life, wealth, dear ones and any other things and therefore, he is completely free from fear. The way of non-violence requires practice of self suffering and sacrifice. "*Ahimsā* is an antidote to... violence. But there is far more to *ahimsā* than merely non-hurting or non-killing. It includes giving up concepts of 'otherness,' 'separateness,'

‘selfishness,’ and ‘self-centeredness’ and identifying oneself with all other beings.”⁶

In addition, according to Gandhi, “Not to hurt any living thing is no doubt part of *ahimsā*. But this is not its least expression. The principle of *Ahimsā* is hurt by every evil thought, by undue haste, by lying, by hatred, by wishing ill to anybody. *Ahimsā* is not merely a negative state of harmlessness but it is a positive state of love, of doing good even to the evil doer. But it does not mean helping the evildoer to continue the wrong or tolerating it by passive acquiescence. On the contrary, love, the active state of *ahimsā* requires you to resist the wrongdoer.”⁷

The objective according to Gandhi was not to search for a successful victory over the opponent, but rather to use *ahimsā* to overcome the oppressor’s inner evil spirit. Gandhi’s idea of *ahimsā* came from combining traditional Jaina and Hindu concepts with ideas he found in Tolstoy and also in Christ’s *Sermon on the Mount*. The result was a “principle that evoked rich religious symbolism and contributed to a dynamic method of action unique in Indian history.”⁸

In a 1915 speech to university students, Gandhi insisted that violence, terrorism and elimination were of foreign significance. It is not native to Indian soil and hence could not take root in India. He advised the students to fight against and resist tyranny, but not by using violence because “that’s not what is taught by our religion, our religion is based on *ahimsā* which is love in action, not only toward friends but even to those who may be our enemies.”⁹ Passive resistance is much more active than violent resistance. It is direct, ceaseless, but three-fourths invisible and only one fourth visible. In its visibility it seems to be

ineffective. Wherever Gandhi saw passivity in an unjust situation, he urged that active nonviolent resistance to replace the passivity. In fact, Gandhi was so opposed to passivity that he advised, if one sees an evil being committed and the only options left are passivity and violence, one should opt for violence. Gandhi believed that in real life there are always more than two options, and we can create effective nonviolent actions.

Suffering and injury to one's self is the essence of *ahimsā*. The ancient Sanskrit word for self-suffering is *tapasya*. It's a part of the doctrinal beliefs of Hinduism and Jainism. Imposing suffering on others is the essence of violence and does not require the positive type of courage that *tapasya* calls for. "The votary of *ahimsā* has to cultivate the capacity for sacrifice of the highest type in order to be free from fear. He who has not overcome fear can't practice *ahimsā* to perfection. He who trembles or takes to his heels the moment he sees two people fighting is not nonviolent but coward. A non-violent person will lay down his life in preventing such quarrels. The bravery of the non-violent is vastly superior to that of the violent."¹⁰ Nonviolent resistance implies the very opposite of weakness. Defiance combined with non-retaliatory acceptance of repression from one's opponents is active, not passive. It requires strength and there is nothing automatic or intuitive about the resoluteness required for using nonviolent methods in political struggle and the quest for truth.

Gandhi believed that *tapasya* was a necessary condition of progress. Self-sacrifice in the form of nonviolent resistance is morally as well as practically superior to violence. The force contained in the emotions of love and compassion is stronger than those contained in hate and revenge. But this does not mean submitting to humiliation. Gandhi insisted that a non-violent resister

must always refuse to do anything that the conscience opposes, even if that refusal to submit means death. Nonviolent action is mere coercive than violence in dealing with oppressors, but the basis of coercion is different. The coercive power of violence springs mainly from destruction: classically, destroying the army of the opponent. Activists using violence need to destroy and destroy until the opponent gives up or loses its capacity to resist.

One of the characteristics about Gandhi that distinguished him from so many other activists was his firm belief in the use of only nonviolent means in the search of political objectives. Gandhi exalted means over ends since he was actually more concerned about living a life dedicated to the philosophy of non-violence and less concerned about political goals. Gandhi's ultimate goal was not to achieve Indian independence, but rather to have Indians behave non-violently toward themselves and the world. For Gandhi the means were the ends and pursuing purity of means in all activities including India's independence struggle was critical. Means and ends became compatible and adaptable for Gandhi. Gandhi was more concerned about how he arrived at a place than where he might be going. He wanted no part of political action that required its objectives by using the impure means of violence, dishonesty, deceit and hate. Gandhi Said, "Non-violence for me is not a mere experiment. It is part of my life and the whole creed of *satyāgraha*, non-cooperation, civil disobedience and the like are necessary deductions from the fundamental proposition that non-violence is the law of our life for human beings. For me, it is both a means and an end."¹¹

Gandhi insisted on right and means to a right end. Intentions of the *satyāgrahi* are key. For example, if a person using non-violent resistance only to

achieve victory over their opponent then it is not a true *satyāgraha*. On the other hand, Gandhi advocated non-violence as a philosophy of life and not just a method. He felt that those who adopt non-violence only for pragmatic reasons still have violence in spirit. Non-violent means were followed as a matter of deep philosophical belief; the door would always be left open for resorting to violence. This Gandhi said was the non-violence of the weak and not the non-violence of the strong and courageous. Gandhi felt that most of his fellow Congress Party members saw non-violence only as an expedient and not the way he did as a creed or philosophy. In 1947, when the Indian subcontinent degenerated into bloody communal violence between Hindu and Muslims, Gandhi blamed the horror on the fact that very few Indians had actually adhered to non-violence the way he had as a total commitment.¹²

Gandhi's non-violence is a social instrument in the struggle for justice and freedom. The faith in non-violence stems from the feeling of unity of the whole mankind against conflict and injustice. Non-violence is dynamic and admits of diverse changes in accordance with changing conditions. The non-violent approach demands that its supporters must possess positive values of courage, absence of ill will against the opponent, self control and self abnegation. *Ahimsā* is a weapon of without equal strength; it is the *summum bonum* of life. It is no lifeless dogma, but a living and life-giving force. Gandhi believes that *ahimsā* is the law of creation and not destruction. Non-violence is the greatest force in the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction.

Gandhi's views on using pure, nonviolent means in the fight for independence can be illustrated by examining *Hind Swaraj* (Indian Home Rule), which is a short book he wrote on a return trip to India from London in 1909. In

Hind Swaraj, Gandhi expressed his views about Indian independence, non-violence, colonialism and Western civilization and he stood by the main principles and arguments presented therein decades later. Using the Socratic technique, *Hind Swaraj* presents a question and answer format between the 'Editor' and the 'Reader'. The Reader represents the impatient, youthful Indian who wants to use any means necessary, including violence to get independence. The Editor is essentially Gandhi expressing his own views. The Reader is skeptical and poses challenging questions and statements to the Editor about the nature of *Swaraj*, non-violence and modern society. Gandhi then uses the Editor's answers as a technique to present his views and principles.

Gandhi's idea of *Swaraj* or independence was not really about sending the British out of India, but to reform the Indian society in ways that reject Western civilization and adopt Indian traditions. He said that "India is being ground down, not under the English heel, but under that of modern civilization."¹³ Gandhi condemns the trappings of modern civilization railways, doctors, lawyers, modern medicine and machinery as evil because they have turned Indians away from God and toward the West, which has lost its spiritual way because it "takes note neither of morality nor of religion."¹⁴

Hind Swaraj represents the height of a process of his disappointment with Western civilization in general and the British Empire in particular. Gandhi argued that the British were held hostage by a lifestyle preoccupied with acquiring material wealth and power at the expense of more important pursuits namely spiritually. He was so convinced of the inferiority of Western civilization and he said that one has only to be patient and it will be self-destructed. Gandhi insisted that true *Swaraj* lay in individuals being able to

govern themselves first. It is *Swaraj* when we learn to rule ourselves. This meant that Indians not only had to pose resistance to the British, but also to reform themselves and control their impure desires. Gandhi constantly advocated about a wide variety of issues on which he required reform, including improved cleanliness and hygiene, ending untouchability, ensuring Hindu Muslim unity, uplifting women and creating economic self-sufficiency in the villages. Indians had often spoken of these types of reforms but ‘Gandhi’s contribution was that he linked them as integral to *Swaraj*.

Gandhi compared his notion of *Swaraj* with Western notions of freedom and independence. His notion was of an all-encompassing universalism that acted affirmatively in uniting the individual with the society. According to Gandhi, *Swaraj* consists of four main elements viz truth, non-violence, political freedom and economic freedom. Gandhi argued that *Swaraj* would be meaningless for India unless people could achieve these four goals. His point was that Indians had to achieve sovereignty over themselves and how they behaved in their own lives before they could achieve real sovereignty over their country. This could only be accomplished through purity of means.

The Hindu Muslim demonstration and civil war that proceeded during India and Pakistan’s creation in 1947 was proof that India had not achieved the true *Swaraj* Gandhi sought, even after the British colonialists departed. Real freedom meant control over one’s most inhuman instincts and Hindu Muslim violence showed Gandhi that Indians had not yet achieved sovereignty over themselves. Gandhi believed that humans, if they are to act and live in society, cannot hope to totally avoid committing *himsā*. The very fact of a person’s

living eating, drinking and moving about brings with it repeated acts of *himsā*. This troubled Gandhi said,

“We have to recognize that there are many things in the world which we do although may be against doing them. Possession of a body, like every other possession, necessitates violence, be it ever so little. The fact is that the path of duty is not always easy to discern amidst claims seeming to conflict one with the other.”¹⁵

Gandhi also held that people can remain true to the faith of *ahimsā* if they ignore to the best of their ability, the destruction of even the lowest creatures. Instead actively try to save them at the same time ensuring that all their actions stem from a position of consideration for and service to others. By living consequently, the practitioner of *ahimsā* will be constantly growing in self restraint and compassion. He can never become entirely free from outward *himsā*.

Gandhi is aware, that in certain cases *himsā* is necessary. The processes of our daily life such as eating, drinking, walking, breathing unavoidably involve *himsā*. But this kind of *himsā* or the unavoidable destruction can't be regarded as *himsā*. Killing or injury to life can be regarded an act of violence only under certain consideration, bad intention and similar other considerations. Any injury to life, done under these motives is *himsā*. Thus the negative meaning of *ahimsā* is non-killing or non-injury, but this presupposes that a non-violent act is free from hatred, anger, malice and the like.

For Gandhi non-violence in its negative sense does not mean non-killing but also more dangerous form of *himsā*. Gandhi points out that these are

insensitive words and harsh judgments, ill-will, words, spite, cruelty, the torture of man and animals and oppression of the weak, the killing of their self-respect. The principle of *ahimsā* is violated by every evil thought, by undue haste, by lying, by hatred, by wishing ill to anybody. It is also violated by our holding on to what the world needs.

Non-violence is not mere not killing. Killing is not *himsā* when life is destroyed for the sake of those whose life is taken. So Gandhi distinguished *ahimsā* from non-killing. As he says, *Ahimsā* does not simply mean non-killing. *Himsā* means causing pain to or killing any life out of anger, or from a selfish purpose or with the intention of injuring it. Refraining from so doing is *ahimsā*. According to him, it is no doubt violence will be violence all time and every kind of violence is sinful. But there are some violence or killing which is not regarded as sinful. So much that the science of daily practice has not only declared the inevitable violence involved in killing for sacrifice as permissible.

For Gandhi certain death or killing is not *himsā* but can be regarded as *himsā*. He has also given many examples to denote that some kind of killing is not regarded *himsā*. As is well known, he once had a calf in his *ahimsā* poisoned because its intense unbearable agony was beyond remedy. Similarly, by force preventing a child from rushing towards the fire and smoking a child bitten by a snake to keep it awake are instances of non-violence provided the motive is not anger but the desire to save the child from injury.

Ahimsā is much incorporated with truth or God. To Gandhi, all men and other creatures of the world are children of God. Hence *ahimsā* is the attitude of harmlessness even to the wrong doer. Gandhi says that *ahimsā* implies positive

love even to the wrong doer. But this does mean interpreting any help to the wrong doer in the persistence of his wrong doing. Because he thought that all human beings are actually one in inner being.

Human nature is basically Truth and *Ahimsā*. *Ahimsā* is the intrinsic characteristic of man. For Gandhi ultimate end of man is realization of Truth or God. The Truth or God can be realized only by means of *ahimsā* or non-violence. *Ahimsā* is the basic and essential quality of mankind. Man is both body and spirit. Body can represent physical power and therefore can of occasions, do *himsā*; but man's true nature consists in his spiritual features. Man as spirit is essentially non-violent. A simple verification of this is the fact that while body or the senses can be injured, the soul can never be injured. *Himsā* therefore, is a lien to man's nature. The moment the spiritual side of man is awakened, his non-violent nature becomes apparent.

This shows that Gandhi's optimism was not naive. Rather, people should do their best in an imperfect world. Moreover, in spite of the incredible acts of cruelty he witnessed, Gandhi was convinced that non-violence is the law of human nature and the only way for people to behave, if they truly wish to be human. He argued that even if people can never hope to be entirely nonviolent in their thoughts, words and deeds, they must retain non-violence as their ultimate goal and strive to make firm progress toward that end.

Gandhi also tried to explain his position as one committed to seek the truth. During World War-I, Gandhi felt that he could best serve the cause of *Swaraj* if he supported the British war effort. He also saw the war as a chance to teach Indians about courage and fearlessness; something that Gandhi felt was a

critical component of *ahimsā*. Many were not impressed with Gandhi's efforts and even ridiculed the logic by which he tried to settle his position on the war with his belief in *ahimsā*. Gandhi later said that, during the war, he was a supporter of the empire and not the 'non-violent rebel' he later became. If he had been, he would not have helped the empire and instead would have used every effort of non-violence to defeat the empire's purpose. In spite of what amounts to some as inconsistency, Gandhi was an outspoken critic against war. Just before he died, he wrote that:

“If war can't be abolished, there is absolutely no hope for the future of the human race, as sooner or later society is bound to annihilate itself...If war is not soon avoided or abolished, a conflict will arise in which entire nations and races will be completely blotted out of existence and even vast continents will be reduced to impotency and dissolution. One thing is clear, therefore: war must be abolished at all costs if civilization is to survive.”¹⁶

Gandhi was a practical idealist. His idealism ran more toward practical action than toward impractical hope and inaction. Gandhi recognized that even if the perfect form of *ahimsā* can't be achieved, people's action should be guided by that ideal, toward which they must repeatedly attempt. Gandhi saw that the exercise of power in social and political relations is unavoidable, so it comes down to how that power will be exercised. Should power be exercised by using violence or non-violence? Of course Gandhi preferred non-violence. Will power be exercised for self-interested gain? Gandhi preferred power to be exercised by people who had freed themselves of 'the tyranny of self-interest'.

It is the firm conviction of Gandhi that *ahimsā* can be practiced universally. It is a power which can be exercised equally by all children young men and women. It does not involve the use of any external object. It only demands a sincerity of purpose and a purity of intentions and it can be practiced by everybody. But there is one supreme condition attached to the practice of *ahimsā*. It can't be practiced unless one has a living and unwavering faith in God, because the votary of *ahimsā* has only one fear that is of God. The practice of *ahimsā* requires an inner strength which can only be generated by a living faith in God. A sincere faith in God will make man see that all human beings are fellow-beings and essentially one. Thus the love of God would turn into a love of humanity, which can make possible the practice of *Ahimsā*. It is as a result of the realization of the unity of mankind that one will be able to love his fellow-beings. Therefore, faith in God is the most fundamental condition for the practice of *ahimsā*.

3.1.2. *Satyāgraha*

The object of *Satyāgraha* is self-purification. *Satyāgraha* is the highest and purest form of non-violence. A true *satyāgrahi* sacrifices all for the sake of justice. Suffering is such a weapon which directly strikes the heart of the oppressor. So suffering has the powerful and dynamic effects on people in general but the oppressor in particular. He says "Real suffering bravely borne melts even a heart of stone. Such is the potency of suffering or *tapas*. And there lies the key to *Satyāgraha*." ¹⁷

The origins of the term *Satyāgraha* has an interesting story behind it. In 1906 resistance campaign against the South African government, Gandhi

realized that the new type of struggle he was heading needed a special name. Because the old terms were unsatisfactory for describing what was emerging. He could not think of a proper word in any Indian language to describe what he was trying to carry out. Nor was he content using the English term passive resistance. Because people considered passive resistance as a method for the weak and powerless, which Gandhi did not overlook. “None of us knew what name to give to our movement; I then used the term ‘passive resistance’ in describing it. I did not quite understand the implications of ‘passive resistance’ as I called it. I only knew that some new principle had come into being. As the struggle advanced the phrase ‘passive resistance’ gave rise to confusion and it appeared shameful to permit this great struggle to be known only by an English name.”¹⁸

Moreover, passive resistance contradicted the very active nature of the technique he was developing. At last he decided to hold a contest through his newspaper, Indian Opinion and offered a prize. The award went to a Gujarati speaking Indian who suggested the term ‘*Sadagraha*’, which means firmness in a good cause. Even though Gandhi liked this term and he refined it to *Satyāgraha*, a term which more precisely reflected the technique he was developing. Gandhi translated *Satyāgraha* to mean the force which is born of truth and love or non-violence. According to Gandhi, truth is the very substance of the soul. *Satyāgraha* can also be seen as pure soul force. Therefore, a *satyāgrahi* uses soul force or truth force as a method of resistance in conflict situations.

“The author of the Sanskrit saying, ‘Forgiveness is an ornament to the brave’, drew upon his rich experience of *satyāgrahis* never giving any one of

the least opportunity of finding fault with them. Distrust is a sign of weakness and *satyāgraha* implies the banishment of all weakness and therefore of distrust, which is clearly out of place when the adversary is not to be destroyed but to be won over.”¹⁹

Satyāgraha is more than a method of resistance. It also works to make well rifts and resolve conflict in society. *Satyāgraha* tried to find not to defeat the opponent, but rather to win them over through a loving, firm and uncompromising adherence to the truth. *Satyāgraha* also calls for adhering to pure means which must be founded on an open search of the truth. Gandhi said that to find truth completely is to realize oneself and one’s destiny that is to become perfect, something which he felt only God was capable of. Discovering the truth was more important to Gandhi than winning any political battle.

“Souls without number spent themselves in the past, are spending themselves in the present and will spend themselves in the future in the service of country and humanity and that is in the fitness of things as no one knows who is pure. But *satyāgrahi* may rest assured, that even if there is only one among them who is pure as crystal, his sacrifice suffices to achieve the end in view. The world rests upon the bedrock of *satyā* or truth. *Asatyā* meaning untruth also means non-existent and *satyā* or truth also means that which is. If untruth does not so much as exist, its victory is out of the question. And truth being that which is can never be destroyed. This is the doctrine of *Satyāgraha* in a nutshell.”²⁰

Satyāgraha as corporate action raises complicated questions of leadership, organization, discipline, training and strategy. *Satyāgraha* is essentially a matter

of quality rather than quantity. So one pure *satyāgrahi*, is enough to win the battle.

A *satyāgrahi* does not use physical force, nor does he or she seek to inflict pain on the opponent. Not only does the *satyāgrahi* avoid the violence associated with, say firearms, but also the violence associated with ill will. Such violence only serves to drive conflicts deeper. Neither weapons nor ill will can perform the healing function that *satyāgraha* can. According to Gandhi “a *satyāgrahi* does not wish the destruction of his antagonist; he does not vent anger on him; but has only compassion for him....A *satyāgrahi* can’t perpetrate tyranny on anyone... he does not strike at anyone. Moreover we don’t bear malice towards the government. When we set its fears at rest, when we don’t desire to make armed assaults on the administrators, nor to unseat them from power, but only to get rid of their injustice, they will at once be subdued to our will.”²¹

Satyāgraha is not anticipated to prevail over an opponent but to prevail over the conflict that separates people to transform the conflict in such a way that all parties are uplifted and brought closer together in a greater sense of community and common interest. *Satyāgraha* is not a selfish zero-sum technique where one person’s victory is another person’s defeat. *Satyāgrahis* must conduct themselves on the highest moral plane. They must show more concern for their opponent than even for themselves. Gandhi said that *satyāgraha* is the vindication of truth not by infliction of suffering on the opponent but on one’s self. The ultimate goal of the *satyāgrahi* is not victory over the opponent, not a significant achievement, but a transformation of the conflict so that it is really resolved, not merely postponed to a later time.

“But my weightiest argument was that the *satyāgrahi* knew that they would have to suffer even unto death, and they were ready to undergo such suffering. Such being the case, there was no sense in proving now that they did suffer. A spirit of revenge being alien to *Satyāgraha*, it was best for a *satyāgrahi* to hold his peace when he encountered extraordinary difficulties in proving the fact of his suffering. A *satyāgrahi* fights only for essentials. The essential thing was that the obnoxious laws should be repealed or suitably amended and when this was fairly within his grasp, he need not bother himself with other things. Again a *satyāgrahi* silence would at the time of settlement stand him in good stead in his resistance to unjust laws.”²²

Satyāgraha must not be practised when the opponent has been weakened by circumstances unrelated to the conflict situation. In South Africa, for instance Gandhi called a halt to a *satyāgraha* campaign protesting discrimination against Indians after white rail workers went on strike, paralyzing much of the transportation and commerce in the region. According to Gandhi, a *satyāgrahi* does not take advantage of an opponent’s weaknesses; rather he or she hopes to convert the heart and soul of the opponent by virtue of adhering to the truth, enduring self-suffering, remaining sincere and chivalrous and by avoiding hurting and humbling the opponent.

Satyāgraha rejects the age-old saying ‘an eye for an eye’ and instead advocates returning good for evil until the person inflicting the evil tires of the conduct and is transformed by the incredible response of the *satyāgrahi*, by patiently and steadfastly adhering to the truth and by willingly suffering the consequences. *Satyāgraha* holds that the differences between opponents will

eventually melt away and real conflict resolution, true reconciliation can commence.

Gandhi was a strong supporter of developing fearlessness among Indians and required to introduce *satyāgrahi* with the same spirit of courage and strength. *Satyāgrahis* must be possessed of strength and fortitude. They are not scared by threats, instead they are willing to risk their lives for the cause of truth. Trust is a consequence of *satyāgraha*'s emphasis on adhering to the truth. According to Gandhi, since a true *satyāgrahi* has learned not to fear anything, not even death, he is therefore never afraid to trust the opponent because 'an implicit trust in human nature is the very essence of his creed.

According to Joan Bondurant, "*Satyāgraha* allows for several stages of winning over an opponent."²³ First, a *satyāgrahi* will use arguments in an attempt to reason with an opponent to get him/her to agree. Else the *satyāgrahi* will raise resistance to the point of self-suffering, in the hope of dramatizing the issue at risk, and of convincing the opponent to come around to their way of thinking. Finally, the *satyāgrahi* will raise resistance even further to include coercive actions aimed at confronting and annoying the opponent. At this level, a *satyāgrahi* engages in the two major forms of non-violent resistance, 'non-cooperation' and 'civil disobedience'.

Non-cooperation means refusing to participate in institutions of value to the opponent. For example, social and economic boycotts and labor strikes. Civil disobedience calls on the protester to refuse to obey with laws considered as unjust. After being convinced that a particular law is unjust, a *satyāgrahi*'s disobeys that law. It does not necessarily mean that, the *satyāgrahi* is an

anarchist interested in promoting disorder by disobeying all laws and resisting government at all turns. On the contrary, a *satyāgrahi* must obey all the laws except those considered unjust. Gandhi called for a willing and respectful obedience to state laws and said that “A *satyāgrahi* obeys the laws of society intelligently and of his own free will, because he considers it to be his sacred duty to do so. It is only when a person has thus obeyed the laws of society scrupulously that he is in a position to judge as to which particular rules are just and which unjust and iniquitous.”²⁴

For Gandhi, commitment to truth demands that one’s life be held open for the world to see. As such, his disobedience of unjust laws must be done openly, honestly and in the good will. Before Gandhi actually engaged in civil disobedience, he would not only announce his intentions to break the law in his newspaper, but he would also write a letter directly to the British authorities, to help him find a way to prevent the confrontation.

Gandhi’s commitment to the truth also meant that he would banish all distinctions between his public and his private life. He held no secrets and shared his personal life with everyone to the extent that one should hardly tell where Gandhi’s personal life ended and his public life began. For instance, Gandhi published editorials confessing the disappointment and pain he felt regarding his disobedient son. On another occasion, extremist Hindus accused Gandhi of being a ‘secret Christian.’ Gandhi said he considered that both a “libel and a compliment, a libel because there are men who believe me to be capable of being secretly anything and a compliment because it was a reluctant acknowledgement of my capacity for appreciating the beauties of

Christianity.”²⁵ Other attempts to be open and truthful caused quite a stir among his supporters.

Gandhi’s use of non-cooperation and civil disobedience as the foundations of *satyāgraha* required a total commitment to *ahimsā*. According to Gandhi a *satyāgrahi* could never use violence “because man is not capable of knowing the absolute truth and therefore is not competent to punish.”²⁶ This displays how truth became the important link between Gandhi’s ideas of *ahimsā* and *satyāgraha*. His singular devotion to the truth forced him not only to resist dishonesty and injustice by refusing to comply with its wishes, but also using non-injurious, non-harmful means. Because, this was the only way truth could be uncovered. Only non-violence could maintain the truth. Violence could never hope to bring out the truth, but only to drive dishonesty even deeper. He considered truthfulness and openness a sign of courage and believed it could empower people. By contrast, he believed that dishonesty, deceit and distrust were the signs of weakness.

3.2. The Difference between *Satyāgraha* and Passive Resistance

As Gandhi points out that there is a great and fundamental difference between passive resistance and *satyāgraha*. Proper understanding of both resistance and *satyāgraha* will do justice to lead to the consequences.

1. Passive resistance is the weapon of the weak. If we continue to believe ourselves and let others believe that we are weak and helpless and therefore offer passive resistance our resistance would never make us strong. On the other hand, if we are *satyāgrahis* and offer *satyāgraha* believing ourselves to be strong, two clear consequences result from it.

Fostering the idea of strength, we grow stronger every day. With the increase in our strength, our *satyāgraha* too becomes more effective and we would never be casting about for an opportunity to give it up.

2. While there is always no scope for love in passive resistance on the other hand hatred had no place in *satyāgraha* but is a positive breach of its ruling principle.
3. In passive resistance there is always a scope for the use of arms when a suitable occasion arrives, but in *satyāgraha* physical force is forbidden even in the most favorable circumstances.
4. Passive resistance is often looked upon as a preparation for the use of force while *satyāgraha* can never be utilized as such.
5. Passive resistance may be offered side by side with the use of arms, but *satyāgraha* and brute force being each a negation of the other can never go together.
6. *Satyāgraha* may be offered to one's nearest and dearest; passive resistance can never be offered to them unless of course they have ceased to be dear and become an object of hatred to us.
7. In passive resistance there is always present an idea of harassing the other party and there is a simultaneous readiness to undergo any hardships entailed upon us by such activity; while in *satyāgraha* there is not the remotest idea of injuring the opponent. *Satyāgraha* postulates the conquest of the adversary by suffering in one's own person.²⁷

3.3. Methods of *Satyāgraha*

Satyāgraha means search of Truth, devotion to Truth or holding on to Truth. Truth in its deepest sense is Spirit, it is God the Infinite. *Satyāgraha* has

therefore, a wide implication and everything that Gandhi did and everything he said could be called *Satyāgraha*. He says, “I will consider myself amply repaid if I have in these pages demonstrated with some success that *satyāgraha* is a priceless and matchless weapon and that those who wield it are strangers to disappointment or defeat.”²⁸

There would then appear to be no fundamental difference between *satyāgraha* and non-violence, worship of truth, fasting, decentralization, condemnation of the use of self-sufficiency. These are different paths leading to the same destination. A determined search for truth takes us nearer the goal and we begin to perceive superficial differences melting away. Gandhi came to prefer the term *Satyāgraha* to ‘passive resistance.’ He used the phrase ‘passive resistance’ because it is well known and easily understood.

Satyāgraha is based on truth and non-violence. Gandhi discovered this term during his endless non-violent resistance movement against racial discrimination in South Africa. In the beginning, Gandhi used the term ‘passive-resistance,’ but as the time passed and his struggle for justice advanced, this phrase gave rise to confusion and was considered as the weapon of the weak.

Satyāgraha was Gandhi’s supreme creation. It stands for a constant and relentless pursuit of truth without resorting to hatred, rancor, ill-will or animosity. Gandhi defined *satyāgraha* as the justification of truth, not by the infliction of suffering on the opponent but on one’s own self. He viewed this technique of struggle as a moral weapon based on the superiority of soul force over physical force.

3.4. Essentials of *Satyāgraha*

The following are some basic postulates of *Satyāgraha*

1. Creative self suffering
2. Faith in human goodness
3. Fearlessness
4. Means and ends
5. Non-violence
6. Rejection of coercion
7. Truth

3.5. Four Categories of *Satyāgraha*

The methods of *Satyāgraha* may be broadly classified into four categories:

Purificatory, penitential device.

Forms of non-cooperation

Methods of civil disobedience

The constructive programme

The division is mainly for conceptual clarity and convenience of presentation.

3.5.1. Purificatory, Penitential Devices

Purificatory, penitential devices include pledges, prayers and fasts. The pledge is a solemn public declaration of one or more *satyāgrahis* that he or they will abstain from, certain acts to clear untruth in themselves. The religious notion of prayer is involved in the invocation of soul-force as an act of purification of self and self-surrender.

3.5.2. Non-co-operation

Co-operation affords strength, force and that ultimately surface as the way for success. Non-cooperation means to stop to co-operate. Even the tyrannical governments can no longer function if co-operation is not extended to it. Any system can collapse if people start non-co-operating or even the most repressive governments, Gandhi maintained, can't stand except for the consent of the governed.

On August 1920, Gandhi called his followers to engage in a non-cooperation campaign against the British. From January 1921 to March 1922 Gandhi steered the non-cooperation campaign through several stages. In 1921 he advocated the Indians to refuse their British titles and decorations as well as engage in a boycott of regional elections and the British law courts. He encouraged the students to depart from government sponsored schools. Thousands of professionals and students followed his recommendation abandoning their positions forever. At the March 1921, meeting of the All India Congress Committee, Gandhi introduced a number of resolutions to uphold the principle of non-violence and to introduce the spinning wheel as a means of political and spiritual liberation. In addition Gandhi decided to simplify his own dress also. He combined his adoption of the loin cloth with his call for the boycott of foreign cloth. In open letters to the mill owners and cloth merchants, he highlighted that the necessary abandonment of the 'unholy trade in foreign cloth' represented an endeavour of their patriotism.

With his adherence to his political principles, Gandhi was forced to witness the non-cooperation campaign disintegrating within a short course of time. The

Khilafat movement did not fare much better as it distorted in the outcome of *Chauri Chaura*. Historically, Gandhi's non-cooperation campaign generated a new focus on divisions and differences between various sections of the Indian population. As different groups promoted their visions of communal reform and new national order, Gandhi's own vision of a united community faded, the *Khilafat* movement was increasingly challenged by images of separation championed by distinct Muslim and Hindu organizations. Ardently aware of his political weakness following the collapse of the non-cooperation campaign the British arrested Gandhi and put him on trial for agitation.

Gandhi gave importance only on the non-violent non-cooperation, because non-cooperation is the main weapon in the store of *satyāgraha*. The idea of non-cooperation is that if the evil doer does not succeed in his purpose, it is the duty of the *satyāgrahi* to suffer for the consequences of resistance and not to yield to the will of the tyrant. Non-cooperation also includes disobedience in a civil manner of the orders of the tyrant. But civil disobedience plays its important part in the corporate part of *satyāgraha*. Cooperation provides strength and force, non-cooperation means to cease to cooperate.

Non-co-operation has many forms, we can include boycott, fasting unto death, *hartal*, *hijrat*.

a. Fasting

Gandhi recommended fasting as the last resort. Fasting is the most potent form of non-cooperation. Fasting aims at the purification of self. It is offered to convince the opponents. It should be prompted by the highest devotion to duty and love for the opponent. It requires a living faith in God. Mere physical

capacity to undertake fast is no qualification for a *satyāgrahi*. He was opposed to fasting as a coercive method to achieve an end.

Some of the critics of Gandhi felt that by fasting, Gandhi was forcing the other people to follow his ideas and that it is a coercive method and involves some kind of violence. It is true that Gandhi tried fasting as a method to change the heart of the wrong doer, but we cannot completely ignore the presence of application of force, which is in fact a subtle form of violence.

b. Strike

Gandhi adopted this technique for opposing the management in meeting the demands of workers. It is a peaceful resistance against the authority. Gandhi pointed out that strikes should be non-violent in spirit for getting the just demands fulfilled. As well as the demands of the strikers must be pure, justified and genuine. The motive of applying this principle was quite pure and highly appreciable.

c. Boycott

Boycott of foreign goods and persons to maintain the country's economy or to avoid co-operation with an oppressor. Boycott of foreign cloth, agricultural labourers boycotting work in the fields of oppressive landlords are the main features of this method. As we know Gandhi's concepts of Satyagraha, *Swaraj* and *Swadeshi* are connected to each other. Boycott of foreign goods involves both the notions of *Swaraj* and *Swadeshi*. Self-reliance (*Swadeshi*) in terms of village economy is at the core of Gandhi's economics. Conceptually Gandhi may talk about universal brotherhood and the world as a single family, but he was convinced that the welfare of the people around us is more important than

the people of other nationalities. Therefore, protecting the village economy, handicrafts and products made in India was dear to Gandhi. Hence he gave a call for the boycott of foreign goods.

d. Hijarat

This kind of *satyāgraha* may be practised by those who cannot put up with loss of self-respect but do not have the courage to practice full *satyāgraha*. The capacity is built to defend themselves with the help of this force. It can be practised by individuals or groups.

3.5.3. Civil Disobedience

The term civil disobedience has its origin in the speeches of Henry David Thoreau. He was the first man to use this expression. The main objective of Henry David Thoreau's 'Civil Disobedience' was to uplift the mankind and to free institutions from evil acts. He believed that man had a natural inclination to goodness and the power of pre-eminence. Though Gandhi was inspired by him but he did not take the Thoreauan interpretation of civil disobedience in the same spirit. This technique is used to fight against an unjust law. Gandhi prescribed this technique as one of the best non-violent techniques for the realization of *sarvodaya*.

It may be asked why Gandhi accepted this technique of *satyāgraha*. It is maintained that it is a technique to fight against an unjust law. Before taking an alternative to this technique, one should try to negotiate, demonstrate and in the end, if negotiation fails, one should disobey the law. Law should be disobeyed so long as the authority refuses to grant the demands. *Satyāgraha* is a much broader concept than civil disobedience or non-cooperation. Civil disobedience,

he said, is “civil breach of unmoral statutory enactments”²⁹. The term civil disobedience has been used because disobedience must be civil in nature.

The forms of *Satyāgraha* that Gandhi seems to favor most are Disobedience, Non cooperation, Direct action and Fasting. Disobedience is considered to be a protest against unjust laws. Gandhi in this regard, seems to be influenced by Thoreau and feels that it is morally more proper to be right and true than to be a follower of the law. He resorted to this technique chiefly in South Africa when he protested against the unjust, discriminatory and racial laws. Non-cooperation is essentially a cleansing process. It affects the *satyāgrahi* more than the other party and is able to give to the *satyāgrahi* a power to face evil and to bear suffering. Non-cooperation, as Gandhi conceives it, amounts to a kind of a refusal on the part of the exploited to be exploited. Gandhi feels that the exploited is also to be blamed for being exploited because he has allowed himself to be exploited. In Non cooperation, there is refusal on the part of the exploited to yield to the forces of exploitation. ‘*Swadeshi*’ is an example of this kind of *Satyāgraha*.

Direct action is conceived as an open and mass revolt. Although the word revolt has associations with violent ways ‘Direct Action’ is essentially non-violent. It is also open in the sense that there is no secret about it. The Quit India call given by Gandhi in 1942 was an example of this kind of *Satyāgraha*. The most effective form of *satyāgraha* according to Gandhi is fasting. It works in both ways, it aims at self purification and also by honestly choosing the way of death it can repair even the determination of the other party. Gandhi also feels that this should be treated as the last weapon of the *satyāgrahi*. Fasting concentrates the energy of the soul and forces the opponent to see reason.

Gandhi attached much importance to *hijarat* and picketing as the techniques of *satyāgraha*. The object of picketing is to prevent the path of a person wanting to do a particular thing. Picketing should avoid violence and coercion. Gandhi prescribed the technique of *hijarat* for those who feel suffocation in their situation due to violence and coercive acts. The real truth-seekers should adopt this method. *Hijarat* literally means voluntary exile from the public life and also from permanent place of living. *Hijarat* is meant only for those who are non-violent and non-coercive.

3.5.4. Constructive Programme

Gandhi hated authoritarianism and he did not want to commit his life to a struggle resulting in a brown dictatorship replacing a white dictatorship. Therefore, he started 'The Constructive Programme', which aimed to empower Indians by making them healthy and building alternative institutions. His constructive program was also his anti-racist program. By the twenties, Gandhi came to stress the Constructive Programme as the most novel mode of *satyāgraha*. In 1925, soon after an argument on different aspects of *satyāgraha* appeared in *Young India*, he stressed the need for *satyāgrahis* to engage in silent, active, constructive work of reform and social service. In 1928, he pointed out that votaries of *satyāgraha* must store up the necessary non-violent energy that could set free an irresistible force in society, that they will become a non-violent organization unless they endure a process of what may be called continuous corporate cleansing. This they can only do by engaging in carrying out a well thought out constructive programme. He later pointed out that all this constructive works should be for its own sake. It is only through such a

Constructive Programme that a system of non-violent self-rule could emerge, that a new social order could be built.

Gandhi put emphasis on constructive programme for the upliftment of the society. Constructive work, according to him, must be constructive in nature. It must be directed towards the welfare of the people as a whole. Through this programme, evils and miseries can be removed. Constructive work includes many programmes, such as, the establishment of hospitals, construction of roads and bridges, and other such works which are beneficial to both individual and society. Constructive work thus aims at the reconstruction of both men and society. It removes evil both from public and private life. It may be stated here that constructive works differ from social service. Social service has different aims to fulfil. Through social service, one tries to help others, if and when in needed. Gandhi said that for him there is no escape from social service, there is no happiness on earth beyond and apart from it. Social service here must be taken to include every department of life. But constructive work does not simply mean the fulfilment of demand. It means to strike out the evils from the grass root level social reformers work on their own accord under constructive programmes. They can't be compelled by any one. Gandhi adopted constructive works in order to get independence and to establish a society based on truth and non-violence. In his words the Constructive Programme may otherwise and more fittingly be called construction of *Purna Swaraj* or Complete Independence by truthful and non-violent means. Present day social thinkers also attach much importance to these works for the realization of a true and perfect society.

Constructive works done during the days of Gandhi could not fulfil his expectations. The constructive programmes could not be fully worked out in his life-time. They were much hampered in the 1942 Movement when many great national leaders were arrested. When Gandhi was released in 1944, he made suggestions to reorient the programmes. After the independence, the new government began to take interest in the uplift of the masses by supporting and taking the responsibility upon itself. The Government was committed to the idea of welfare state and, therefore engaged workers in the activities of constructive programmes. The Bhoodan movement imparted a new strength in the field of constructive work from 1951 to 1957. In 1957 Vinoba Bhave the staunch advocates of sarvodaya began thinking on new lines in order to keep the sarvodaya ideal moving.

In 1941, Gandhi wrote a note on the constructive programme, stressing in the Indian context the need for working toward communal unity, removal of untouchability, programme of adult education and village improvement, peasant uplift and the development of nonviolent labor unions, economic and social equality, decentralized economic production and distribution through the promotion of cottage and small-scale industries and the elimination of various social evils. He pointed out that, whereas civil disobedience could be most effective in the remedy of local wrongs, it could never be directed for a general cause such as is possible with the constructive programme. The handling of civil disobedience without the constructive programme will be like a paralyzed hand attempting to lift a spoon. Civil disobedience is itself an aid to constructive effort and a full substitute of armed revolt. Simultaneously the best training for proper civil disobedience is through the constructive programme.

Carried out to its utmost limit, *Satyāgraha* is independent of economic or other material assistance; even its elementary form of physical force. Indeed, violence is the negation of this great spiritual force, which can only be exercised by those who will entirely avoid violence. It is a force that may be used by individuals as well as by communities. It may be used as well in political as in domestic affairs. Its universal applicability is a demonstration of its permanence and invincibility. It can be used similarly by men, women and children. It is totally untrue to say that it is a force to be used only by the weak so long as they are not capable of meeting violence by violence. This superstition arises from the incompleteness of the English expression, passive resistance. It is impossible for those who consider themselves to be weak to apply this force. Only those who realize that there is something in man which is superior to the brute nature in him and that the latter always yields to it can effectively be *satyāgrahis*.

This force is to violence, and therefore to all tyranny, all injustice, what light is to darkness. In politics, its use is based upon the immutable rule that Government of the people is possible only so long as they approve either consciously or unconsciously to be governed. *Satyāgrahis* of South Africa did not want to be governed by the Asiatic Act of 1907 of the Transvaal, and it had to go before the mighty force. Two courses were open to them, when they were called upon to submit to the Act, or to suffer the penalties prescribed under the Act and thus to draw out and exhibit the force of the soul within for a period long enough to appeal to the sympathetic chord in the governors or law makers. They had taken long to achieve what they set about striving for. That was because their *Satyāgraha* was not of the most complete type.

An exact analysis of Gandhi's teachings seems to show that it was the positive and constructive factors that were his first concern from which the absence of physical violence was intended to appear as a natural and inevitable consequence. Non-violence raises the conflict from the destructive physical to the constructive moral level.

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