

Research Article

Non-Violence, Truth and Love

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A B S T R A C T

Non-violence and truth are one of the most indomitable elements of the philosophy propounded by Mahatma Gandhi. It was the approach which was accepted as only logical approach to morality by Martin Luther King. Gandhi was a grand advocate of truth, non-violence and was very buoyant about their role in the lives of the masses in order to make the world a sustainable and harmonious place. According to Gandhi non-violence is the ultimate way to discover truth and this is for the same reason both of them are knotted in such a way it is practically impossible to disengage them. The paper, thus, encapsulates the hidden layers of the Gandhain philosophy called Satyagraha along with a live interview of Gandhi with Sir Chimanlal.

Keywords: Truth, Non-Violence, Love, Satyagraha and God

Non-violence is one of the major elements in Gandhian philosophy which constitutes methods of *Satyagraha* advocated by Gandhi. Where, Non-violence means method of approaching truth. However, Gandhi says:

“Nevertheless, ahimsa is the means; Truth is the end. Means to be means must always be within our reach, and so ahimsa is our supreme duty. If we take care of the means, we are bound to reach the end sooner or later”¹.

Gandhi writes again, “I want to see God face to face. God, I know is Truth. For me the only certain means of knowing God is non-violence-ahimsa-love.”²

I shall discuss later on, how non-violence in Gandhi's thought is also called love. But here, let us see how non-violence becomes the means of achieving the end of satyagraha. If this becomes clear, there are many possibilities of satyagraha, which could be applied to solve human problems and humanize the human race.

The following is a dialogue between Gandhi and the Counsel of the Hunter committee.³

Sir Chimanlal: With regard to your Satyagraha doctrine, so far as I understand it, it involves the pursuit to truth and in that pursuit you invite suffering on yourself and not cause violence to anybody else.

Mr. Gandhi: Yes, Sir.

Q. However, honestly a man may strive in his search for truth his notions of truth may be different from the notions of others. Who then is to determine the truth?

A. The individual himself would determine that.

Q. Different individuals would have different views as to truth. Would that not lead to confusion?

A. I do not think so.

Q. Honestly striving after truth is different in every case.

A. That is why the non-violence part was a necessary corollary. Without that there would be confusion and worse.

Thus non-violence is the means whereby truth is discovered, without doing violence to another person, who may hold a different interpretation of truth. There is no passive compromise and giving up of one's own truth, but an active pursuit after truth which is in the nature of non-violence. Gandhi is so convinced of the need of non-violence in the process of searching for truth, that he is able to affirm the impossibility of arriving at truth without non-violence.

Gandhi writes:

It is perhaps clear from the foregoing, that without ahimsa it

is not possible to seek and find Truth. Ahimsa and Truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to detangle and separate them. They are like two sides of a coin, or rather of a smooth unstamped metallic disc.⁴

Gandhi, in using the concept of ahimsa, is no doubt influenced by different religions such as Hindu, Jain and Buddhist traditions. However, he never feels that he is bound to their interpretations. He lifts the concept of ahimsa from its general and broad understanding and gives it a human dimension. This introduction of human dimension is the creative contribution of Gandhi to the traditional understanding of ahimsa.

Gandhi writes:

Ahimsa is not the crude thing it has been made to appear. Not to hurt any living thing is no doubt a part of Ahimsa. But it is its least expression.

And then, Gandhi goes on to say:

"The principle of ahimsa is hurt 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 that world needs."⁵

Gandhi was humanizing the concept of non-violence and liberating it from its unfortunate interpretation. He was successful in giving a new meaning to this concept, only as he equated it with love.

He was touching the very foundation of human personality, the very core of man. He was touching the source of man's possibilities, to humanize himself and other people. To lift man above the animal level and thus open the possibilities of further evolution of man, to a much higher level. Erikson catches this glimpse in Gandhi's thought and thus he writes:

"With all respect for the traditional translation of ahimsa, I think Gandhi implied in it, besides a refusal not to do physical harm, a determination not to violate another person's essence. For even where one may not be able to avoid harming or hurting, forcing or demeaning another whenever one must coerce him, one should try even doing so, not to violate his essence, for such violence can only evoke counter-violence, which may end in a kind of truce, but not in truth. For ahimsa as acted upon by Gandhi not only means to hurt another, it means to respect the truth in him."⁶

Respecting the truth in another can be done only when one is able to respect another's integrity. Truth demands that one practice love and non-violence, otherwise one will be led astray into falsehood and to a vicious cycle, from where a return becomes complicated. Where man has been dehumanized, and made into an object to be manipulated, the law of love cannot be practiced.

Gandhi is not talking about the ordinary love but a love

which is self-giving. It is almost like agape in the Christian sense.

M.M. Thomas writes:

"It is generally admitted today that the Gandhian application of the principle of ahimsa have greatly enriched our understanding of love when it is applied as technique for the solution of political and social conflicts. In the process, the concept of ahimsa has itself changed in many of its emphasis. It has tended to lose much of its past rigidity and dogmatism and has acquired some of the freedom characteristics of agape."⁷

Gandhi himself expounds this fact in his own words:

"This law of love is nothing but a law of truth. Without truth there is no love; without truth it may be affection, as for one's country, to the injury of others; or infatuation, as of young man for a girl; or love may be unreasoning and blind, as of ignorant parents for their children. Love transcends all animality and is never partial. Satyagraha has therefore been described as a coin, on whose face you read love and on the reverse you read truth."⁸

Thus Gandhi makes an attempt to liberate even the concept of love. A love which is selfish is not a source of non-violence. It has a tendency to do violence to the objects of love, in a deceptive manner.

This love of which Gandhi speaks is not a product of sentimentality or the product of any desire for one's own end. This is a love in which mutuality exists, and one is willing to sacrifice everything, including his own life, not out of fear or submission or cowardice but out of strength to bear suffering for others. In the process, truth is not sacrificed; neither is love. Both truth and love find themselves in a creative tension, which results in growth. Lahey puts it this way:

I have confidence in non-violent struggle because I think it is the best expression of the two most important values—love and truth. Love as the supreme value which can lead as we think, it sentimentality; in our identification with others we can so easily go beyond understanding wrong behavior to excusing it. But truth as the dominating value can lead to ruthlessness; when we focus on correctness we may let facts, principles, and logic dehumanize the subject of our interest.

Philosophically, non-violence is what happens when love and truth are equal and in tension with each other.⁹

One more dimension where Gandhi introduces in his concept of non-violence and love is the dimension of man's finitude and his need to have faith in God. Man on his own strength cannot practice non-violence, in its full sense. Thus Gandhi shows the need of dependence. This is another attempt on the part of Gandhi to save man from

pride and infuse in him a sense of humility. Gandhi says: "The fact is that Satyagraha presupposes the living presence and guidance of God. The leader depends not on his own strength but on that of God. He acts as the Voice within guides him."¹⁰

Gandhi says, "In the long run non-violence cannot work in those who have not a living faith in the God of love."¹¹

The above stated statement clearly shows that the source of non-violence did not arise from one's own being but from God himself. God, for Gandhi, resides in man. He is not outside to be searched. He is within and therefore; any search must begin from within. However, man cannot claim himself as the source of this love of which Gandhi speaks.

It is impossible to have a living faith in non-violence without a living faith in God. No man can practice non-violence without the power of God's grace. Unless he has it he cannot have courage to die without anguish, fear, revenge. And this comes from the belief that God is in every man's heart and that one should have no fear in God's presence. To know the omnipresence of God inspires man with reverence for life, even the life of those we call our enemies.¹²

Thus, we come to a conclusion that Gandhi's method of *satyagraha* is a powerful method to deal with human relation in an authentic way. In any encounter, between two people, it is the love which binds them in mutual growth. But when love is absent, violence comes to the surface, and division becomes the mode of existence. Instead of mutuality and creative tension, there is strife and division. Man becomes violent to others, as well as to himself and in the process becomes less than man, in Gandhi's term to become a "brute". Moreover, Gandhi realized that the limitations of human nature and thus he gave the opinion of non-violence which cannot be practiced in its fullness.

Hence, Ahimsa really means that you may not offend anybody, you may not harbor an uncharitable thought even in connection with one who may consider being your enemy ... If we resent a friend's action or the so-called enemy's action, we still fall short of this doctrine ... If we harbor even this thought, we depart from this doctrine of ahimsa. Those who join the Ashram have to literally accept that meaning. That does not mean that we practice that doctrine in its entirety. Far from it. It is an ideal which we have to reach, and it is an ideal to be reached even at this very moment, if we are capable of doing so.¹³

This statement illustrated that Gandhi understands of human nature and its limitations. However, it also reflects Gandhi's own perseverance in following the doctrine of non-violence, with the recognition where the ideal must always be kept in front.

On the whole, Gandhi's concept of non-violence comes

very close to the Christian concept of love of God (Agape). Certainly, it has the quality of sacrifice and outreach but is not completely free from a concern for personal welfare. However, his concept is a corrective to the sentimental attitude of many Christians to the concept of love. Moreover, Gandhi demonstrated that it is possible to love one's enemies without submitting passively to his injustices.

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