

Gandhi: A Votary of Truth and Non Violence

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ABSTRACT: *Ahimsa is the means, Truth is the end. The discussion here has been an attempt to study the concept of truth and non violence under the light of concept of Gandhian thought and philosophy. It is the elemental concept of M K Gandhi in the study of socio-political philosophy. The holy book Geeta has immense influence in moulding the philosophy of M K G. A unique concept of Ahimsa promulgated by him which had been polished in his run of life time several times. His concept of silence, law of truth, non violence, international politics in light of non violence all are discussed, analysed with a critical view. He has the opinion for the man kind to survive peace and non violence is most important to observe every walk of life. But thought that his movements did not at all depend on non-violent workers as believers in the creed of non-violence.*

KEY WORDS: *Truth, Non violence, Ahimsa, silence, truth, peace, concept, law.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

For Gandhi Truth is equivalent to God. Non Violence or Ahimsa and Truth are the twin concepts which seem to be fundamental to the whole of the social and political philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi. In the evolution of his thought, Gandhi was primarily influenced by the great religions of the world. The classics of Hinduism, Hindu ethics ever since the time of the Upanishads had always laid stress on the value of Ahimsa or non-injury to all living things - human or otherwise. This tradition was further developed in the epics of India which also wielded great influence on Gandhi.

It was the Bhagavat Geeta, however which had the decisive effect on the mind of Gandhi. Gandhi believed that the central theme of the Geeta was that a balanced state of mind can be achieved by killing all passions and by renouncing desires, rather than objects. It is from this that he deduced that the result of selfless detachment must be the uttermost truth and non-violence. Non-violence had been the leading tenet of the Jain philosophy. Likewise, Buddhism laid great emphasis on 'Ahimsa'. It is the concept of the brotherhood of man in Islam which appealed to Gandhi most. Christianity has of course, had these ideals as integral part of the conception of virtuous life.

His concept of truth and non-violence are historically rooted in the Hindu, Buddhist and Jain traditions. The word 'Rta' as used in the Vedas refers to the principle of moral orders inherent in the universe as well as to the overall cosmic equilibrium. Later on this word seems to be replaced by the word 'Dharma', which means 'that which sustains or upholds'. In this sense the word refers to the Moral law which maintains the whole world, including the individual and the society. This cosmic law has been identified with Truth in the Vedas as well as in the later Hindu tradition. The Brihadaranyak Upanishad says that with the help of Satya which is Dharma, even the weaker could gain victory over the strongest.

Bhisma in Mahabharata declared that abstention from injury to creatures was the real Dharma. Hence Satya and Ahimsa have been traditionally identified with Dharma in Hinduism. In the Buddhist tradition, Himsa and Asatya alike form the sin of separateness. It is due to this that man is engaged in narrow self interest and resorts to violence and untruth. Similarly in the Jain texts it is said that asset definitely leads to violence. Upanishads which also influenced Gandhi, describe God-Brahman as Truth, Knowledge and Infinite. The Upanishadic seers like the neo-platonic mystics of later days, the Sufis of Islam and Tolstoy conceive of God as the reality within us, which directly manifests itself in our inner knowledge, consciousness and life. So knowledge is nothing but God itself and knowledge of God is not different from this God in us. Tolstoy, for example, had a great influence on Gandhi and it is his work - 'The Kingdom of God is within you' which gave a permanent form to Gandhi's idea of truth and love.

In formulating his concept of Ahimsa and in making it the main moral and spiritual weapon of his life journey, Gandhi was definitely influenced from the various sides, but still in an important sense his concept of Ahimsa was uniquely his own. The lesson of ahimsa is present in every religion and Gandhi was well aware of it. He repeatedly pointed out that ahimsa was advocated in the Gita, the Bible, the Koran and much more particularly in the teachings of Buddhism and Jainism. But again he himself claimed that his conception of ahimsa was independent in many respects of the sanction of the scriptures. As a young man Gandhi became familiar with the principle of winning over an enemy by love by the poems of the Gujrati poet Samalbhatta. The

teaching of Ali, the son-in-law of Prophet Mohammad had a very definite and great effect on Gandhi's concept of ahimsa. Ali's suffering is an influence for Gandhi. Jaina philosophy had also a great effect on Gandhi's concept of Ahimsa. Jaina's regarded ahimsa as the greatest virtue. Vegetarianism and other non violent practices and rituals of Jain's flow from the principle of ahimsa.

II. METHODOLOGY

Analytical and descriptive method to get an insight of the titled discussion adopted on the light of wide array of books, journals, papers, and peer discussions. A good length of discussion with University scholars, my teachers and some of Gandhian scholars helped a lot to analysis the topic and came to a conclusion. Personnel visit of MK Gandhi's home town Porbandar and Rajkot, Sabarmati Ashrams at Ahmadabad and Seagram Ashram at Wardha all helps a lot to get first hand view of his philosophy vis- a- vis his religion and understanding of God.

III. ANALYSIS

Significance: Truth and Non-violence:- Gandhiji emphasised the purity of means in every walk of life. During India's struggle for freedom he had once remarked, "I am prepared to sacrifice everything for the liberation of my country, but not Truth and Non-Violence". [1] This clearly shows how these two concepts are integral to his philosophy. "The word Satya (Truth) is derived from Sat, which means 'Being'. Nothing is or exists in reality except Truth. That is why Sat or Truth is perhaps the most important name of God. In fact it's more correct to say that Truth is God, than to say that God is Truth". [2] Truth is the sole justification for our existence. "All our activities should be centred in Truth. Truth should be the very breath of our life. When once this stage in the pilgrim's progress is reached, all other rules of correct living will come without effort, and obedience to them will be instinctive. But without Truth it would be impossible to observe any principles or rules in life".[3] Again Gandhi himself once said, "As a Jain muni once rightly said, I was not so much a votary of ahimsa as I was of truth, and I put the latter in the first place and the former in the second. For, as he put it, I was capable of sacrificing non-violence for the sake of Truth. In fact, it was in the course of my pursuit of Truth that I discovered non-violence".[4]

Gandhi was a votary of truth from his childhood. So he said, "I claim to be a votary of truth from my childhood. It was the most natural thing to me. My prayful search gave me the revealing maxim 'Truth is God' instead of the usual one God is truth. That maxim enables me to see God face to face as it were. I feel Him pervade every fibre of my being". [5] But in discovering truth, "the atheists have not hesitated to deny the very existence of God-from their own point of view rightly. And it was because of this reasoning that I saw that rather than say that God is Truth I say that Truth is God".[6]

Gandhi has taken Satya also as a moral virtue, rather the greatest moral virtue (Satya nasti paro dharmah) and as a great moral vow. In this sense it means 'truthfulness' or 'speaking the truth'. And for the observance of this moral virtue or vow, complete fearlessness and non-possession (Aparigraha) are required according to Gandhi. Without being fearless one cannot speak the naked truth and also so long as one has sensuous attraction towards wordly possessions, one cannot have the courage always to speak the truth. He thought that only a man with a selfless motive can be fearless and speak the truth. Gandhi believed the following sentences 'Satyam Bruyat Na Bruyat Satyamapriyam'. One should speak the truth in polite and sweet language and not harshly.

Gandhi himself declared that "Ahimsa is my God, and Truth is my God. When I look for Ahimsa, Truth says 'Find it through me'. When I look for Truth, Ahimsa says, 'Find it out through me'" [7]

The virtues of fearlessness, non-possession etc. is required according to Gandhi not only for the observance of the moral virtue of truth, but also for the realization of Truth in its metaphysical sense in which it is identical with God. About the need of fearlessness in search of Truth. He believed that perfect realization of Truth is not possible so long as we have the physical body with us. Gandhi was a devotee of truth. He never compromised with truth. He never obscured anything knowingly from the light of truth. Speaking the truth became so much a part of his nature that to utter an untruth became physically mere impossible for his tongue. In his view, the duty of speaking the truth, where one's own self was concerned, was, paramount In this regard, there was no place of admitting of exceptions or excuses. Gandhi distinguished between absolute and relative Truth and told that although we are not able to realize the Absolute Truth, we could have partial glimpses of it in what might be called relative truths. No particular relative truth could be identified with the Absolute Truth and therefore no individual or community could claim the achievement of the final truth. He believed that every one of us realized Truth partially in our own relative way and therefore all such realization was equally valuable and important. Gandhi mentioned that, "The relative truth must, meanwhile, be my beacon, my shield and buckler. Even my Himalayan blunders have seemed trifling to me because I have kept strictly to this path. I have gone

forward according to my light. Often in my progress I have had my faint glimpse of the Absolute Truth, God and daily the conviction is growing on me that he alone is real and all else is unreal”.[8] Regarding Truth Gandhi said, “He who would go in for novel experiments must begin with himself. That leads to a quicker discovery of Truth, and God always protect the honest experimenter”.[9]

Spiritual Discipline, Silence and Truth: - Gandhi believed that silence is a part of spiritual discipline in human life. So again he declared, “Experience has taught me that silence is a part of spiritual discipline of a votary of Truth. Proneness to exaggerate, to suppress or modify the truth, willingly or unwillingly, is a natural weakness of man and silence is necessary in order to surmount it. A man of few words will rarely be thoughtless in his speech, he will measure every word”.[10] For the concentration of our mind also silence is essential for everyone. For the spiritual development silence is necessary. In the attitude of silence the soul finds the path in a clearer light, and what is elusive and deceptive resolves itself into crystal clearness. Our life is a long and arduous quest after Truth, and the soul requires inward restfulness to attain its full height. Regarding truth Gandhi thought that the voice within us is truth. He believed in the voice of conscience, because in the light of the Hindu tradition he told that every individual had a divine element in him in the form of his soul. It means that according to Gandhi the inner voice as conscience is the sole source or judge for knowing what truth is. He mentioned that if we want to know truth, we must fully discipline ourselves by acquiring the virtue of truthfulness, humility, purity and above all non-violence, poverty and non-possession.

Truth is Everywhere: Regarding the law of truth Gandhi told that truth is in everywhere. According to him observation of the law of Truth is understood merely to mean that we must speak the truth. There should be Truth in thought, Truth in speech, and Truth in action. To the man who had realized this truth in his fullness, nothing else remains to be known, because all knowledge is necessarily included in it. What is not included in it is not Truth, and so not true knowledge; and there can be no inward peace without true knowledge. If we once learn how to apply this never failing test of Truth, we will at once be able to find out what is worth doing, what is worth seeing, what is worth reading.

Truth is God: Truth is the right designation of God. Hence there is nothing wrong in every man following Truth according to his lights. Indeed it is his duty to do so. Then if there is a mistake on the part of anyone while following Truth, it will be automatically set right. For the quest of Truth involves tapas - self suffering, sometimes even unto death. There can be no place in it for even a trace of self interest. In such selfless search for Truth nobody can lose his bearings for long. When he takes to the wrong path he stumbles, and is thus redirected to the right path. Therefore, the pursuit of Truth is true bhakti. It is the path that leads to God. There is no place in it for cowardice, no place for defeat. It is the talisman by which death itself becomes the portal to life eternal. For Gandhi to think one thing, speak another and do a third is untruth. He thought that untruth arises from fear.

Ahimsa or Non-Violence:-“The surest means to Truth, according to Gandhi, is ahimsa. As a matter of fact, the two are so inextricably bound up together that it is very difficult to disentangle them. Gandhi of course regarded Truth as somewhat superior to ahimsa because he took the former as the end and the latter as merely a means, but, as we know it fully well, ‘means’ and ‘end’ were convertible terms for him because he took the two as practically inseparable. He was of the firm faith that a good end, however good it might be, could not be desirable unless it was attained through good means”.[11] Thus we come to hold that Truth and Ahimsa are everything in life of Gandhi. In the scale of values, Truth is higher than Ahimsa. He too believed that Ahimsa is the indispensable means for the discovery of Truth. Regarding Non-violence Gandhi mentioned “Non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man. Destruction is not the law of humans. Man lives freely only by his readiness to die, if need be, at the hands of his brother, never by killing him. Every murder or injury to other, no matter for what cause, committed or inflicted on another is a crime against humanity”.[12] Gandhi practised ahimsa as an active force and remarked it as soul force. Non-violence, as wrongly believed by many, was not a purely negative affair. It was not non-resistance. It was non-violent resistance. It was a positive and dynamic method of action. It was not meant for those who meekly accept the status quo. The very purpose for which it was designed was to create a political unrest in society and thus to change existing conditions. Gandhi believed non-violence as not super method but braver and superior method of resistance. For him non-violent resistance is superior to violent resistance. Gandhi again told that in non-violence there is no cloak for cowardice- “I do believe that where there only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence. Abstinence is forgiveness only when there is the power to punish. But I do not believe myself to be a helpless creature; only I want to use India’s and

my strength for a better purpose”- [13] Though non-violence means non-killing, but for Gandhi it has a higher meaning. It signifies avoiding injury to anything on earth in thought word or deed. A votary of non-violence should not only keep away from causing hurt to the body of an individual, but also offending him by harsh speech and from even thinking ill of him. He should not consider anyone his enemy. If anyone thinks him to be his enemy, he should harbour no ill-will against him. According to Gandhi non-violence is the extreme limit of forgiveness. But forgiveness is the virtue of the strong only, because it presupposes the ability to strike. It is not the cult of defenceless, a weapon of the weak, but on the contrary, it can be employed only by the strong. It presupposes a high degree of self-restraint, which alone can inspire determination in man. It implies benevolence, sympathy and largeness of hearts of all, Ahimsa means not only injury, but also positive love and charity. This love and charity is not meant only for one’s men or for some stray wrong doer, but also for one’s enemy. The real test of one’s ahimsa according to Gandhi is that he possesses no ill will even towards his enemy. He rather loves him as he would love his wrong doing father or son. Furthermore, true observance of ahimsa requires self-suffering rather than inflicting suffering upon the wrong doer. Ahimsa includes truth and fearlessness. Thus it is clear that to be a follower of ahimsa in the Gandhian sense is not a very easy task. It is, as Gandhi sometimes himself said, like a tapasya.

Gandhi said that non-violence is related with the concept of God also. When we believe in God then again we have faith upon non-violence. Gandhi believed that 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 best expression. The principle of Ahimsa 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. But the world needs even what we eat day by day. Realizing the limitations of the flesh, we must strive day by day towards the idea with what strength we have in us.

The important points of Ahimsa are: (1) That the main spring of ahimsa or non-violence is love and the true criterion of non-violence is therefore, this inner feeling in the heart, (2) that if we do not ignore the inner call of love, we are obliged to desist from injury to living beings as far we can, (3) that it is wrong to think, therefore, that since we cannot observe complete non-violence, we should not try to observe the little we can, (4) finally that the more we try to practice love and compassion the more we can increase them and can become morally elevated and truly happy. Gandhi thinks that evil and injustice, exploitation and tyranny must be fought, but he insisted that the weapons must be non-violent, pure and moral. So he mentioned that violence is the law of the jungle and love is the law of the human species. Gandhi believed that ahimsa would lead to the truth, to find which ought to be the common object of all human beings. Mutual respect, friendliness, co-operation all are forms of love. “Non-violence is embedded in Truth and vice versa”. [14]

Non-Violence and International Politics:-By international Freedom, Gandhi did not mean absolute independence. This would be inconsistent with progressive internationalism. He believed that his notion of Purna-Swaraj is not isolated independence but healthy and dignified interdependence. Actually, Gandhi had before him the ideal of a world government. It was clear to Gandhi that absolutely independent states would be worrying among themselves and what was needed was federation of friendly independent states. According to him the only condition on which the world could live was to be united under one central governing body composed of representatives of the component parts.

Gandhi wanted the application of the principles of non-violence to the sphere of international relations. He suggested that the League of Nations should use the sanction which India’s national movement was using against the British. He also conceded that voluntary associations would take up the great cause of the peace of the world. A non-violent world organization would give up armament and the use of force to defend even proved rights. He welcomed international peace brigades. It was Gandhi’s view that there should be complete and general disarmament but before that could take place; some nations would have to dare to disarm themselves and take large risks. Gandhi’s world order would not emerge till imperialism had not been liquidated and all nations, big or small and had become free and equal.

The principal condition for peaceful world, according to Gandhi, was just political and economic international relations and the ending of the domination over one state by another. So long as great nations did not shed competition and the desire to multiply one’s possessions, it would not be possible to achieve a peaceful world order.

While this was the ultimate picture for which Gandhi was to strive, he envisaged a non-violent Indian state which would live on the friendliest terms with its neighbours, whether they be great powers or small nations. The state would not covet any foreign territory. It would share its moral and material resources with people across the boundaries. It would be at peace with the rest of the world. It would work for total disarmament and for the establishment of a non-violent international order. Its non-violence would command universal respect and arouse the goodwill of its neighbours. For its defence, it would rest on the goodwill of the whole world. Gandhi has his own ideas about ways of meeting aggression. It was his belief that a non-violent

state would easily become a victim of aggression but even if it did, non-violent defence would be relatively easy. A non-violent society rests on the assumption that nobody would disturb it but if the worst happened, it could meet the aggressor to take possession and then non-co-operate with it. The second way would be to suffer non-violent resistance. People without any arms would become fodder for the aggressor's cannon. The underlined belief of Gandhi was that even the worst aggressor was susceptible to moral influences. A non-violent country would not allow any army to devastate a neighbouring country. It would refuse passage to the invading army and refuse it all supplies. He would prefer the economic boycott of the aggressor nation by natural states. Even if the victim of aggression had chosen to put up violent resistance, the non violent state would extend its moral sympathy and support to them. It was Gandhi's belief that if all other states could untidily offer against the aggressor states moral resistance, war and aggression would be whipped up.

In Gandhi's mind, non-violence was not simply a political tactic which was supremely useful and efficacious in liberating his people from foreign rule, in order that Indian might then concentrate on realizing its own national identity. On the contrary, the spirit of non-violence sprang from an inner realization of spiritual unity in him. The whole Gandhian concept of non-violent action and Satyagraha is incomprehensible if it is thought to be a means of achieving unity rather than as the fruit of inner unity already achieved. Gandhi believed that for practising Ahimsa another important fact is very necessary - this is the belief in God. But since for him truth is God, he was not talking about the concept of God, as conceived by a particular religion. He was secular in outlook and he believed in oneness of all religions. Therefore, he remarked that a sincere faith on God makes man realise that all human beings are essentially one. Thus love of God was transformed into love of humanity which was a kind of universal brotherhood.

It is very important that his views on non-violence and love brought a ray of sunshine to lighten the gloom and darkness prevailing at that time. Buddha also did the same. Gandhi believed that his message of non-violence spread far and wide and he made India, a country with a vision of secularism, non-violence and tolerance. Actually Gandhi's whole philosophy was inter-linked with the other. It is nothing but his universal understanding of the spirit of Truth.

Gandhi thought that there are three kinds of killings and that was the duty of man to resist injustice- a) In case of fulfilment of the individual's biological needs when one is raped, one is permitted to use violence. b) To protect those who are under one's care. c) In danger able situation to save one it is duty to kill and this is not violence.

Thus Gandhi's idea of Satyagraha, non-possession, Brahmacharya, truthfulness etc. are all related with the idea of non-violence.

Gandhi believed that non-violence must be accepted as a higher value than human life. He thought that there is no harm to sacrifice lower value for the sake of higher value. Higher value we can say is a way for the welfare of the society. Therefore non-violence is nothing but expression of selfless love which is connected with the concept of God.

Gandhi again believed that the removal of untouchability is one of the height expressions of Ahimsa. Gandhi believed in the Sanskrit dictum "ahimsa paramo dharma". But why it should be regarded as the highest virtue? The reason is he briefly writes in his diary that without ahimsa, Truth cannot be realized. Truth for him was God that pervaded all beings, which was preserved and unified through love. God can be realized by loving God and to love God is to love the beings in which He is incarnate.

IV. CONCLUSION

Ahimsa or Non-Violence is a supreme virtue. Ahimsa is non -injury to life and Ahimsa as love is the parent of all the other cardinal virtues. The biggest choice today is whether nations would opt for violence or non-violence. Welfare of all or total annihilation. On the one hand we would have dignity of labour, creativity, sharing, and appreciation of nature, love, peace, Ahimsa, forgiveness and soul force. On the other would be hatred, anger, jealousy, competition, intolerance, violence and terrorism. It is up to us to decide which to choose. Gandhi warned of the danger of violence. In the present age society many of his fears are coming true. There is communal unrest, racial wars, consumerism, pollution, commercialisation of education, atrocities on women, exploitation, marginalisation of tribes and spread of AIDS and other diseases. Gandhi felt that constructive programmes were the only solution to all these problems. At the present society we are facing trouble in protecting our national integration. We have seen lack of morality, corruptions, intolerance, and terrorism in every field of our national life. Our life is becoming aimless and we are quarrelling among each other for power and status forgetting our own duty. So the present time is to recollect Gandhi's teachings again to remove the evil power of our society through the practice of truth and non-violence. The spiritual upliftment of our society was the main aim of his life. Society is a must for him. Gandhi found that there was injustice everywhere and in every field of life. The future of our society will remain dark if we do not follow the way of Truth and Non-violence. A firm believer in non-violence like Gandhi advocates in his later life permissible

degree of violence in particular circumstances. Gandhi expected democracy to blossom forth in a non-violent society that renounces exploitation.

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