

Gandhian Strategy and India's Struggle for Independence.

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ABSTRACT

In the present paper an attempt has been made to understand the strategy adopted by Mahatma Gandhi during India's Struggle for Independence. The peaceful and non-violent techniques of Mahatma Gandhi like non-violence, Satyagraha, non-cooperation, civil disobedience, fasts etc. which formed the basis of his strategy during the freedom struggle against the British yoke are discussed in this paper. The paper then goes on to elaborate the Gandhian strategy which was based on an understanding vis-à-vis British rule in India and how he alternated the phases of confrontation with non-confrontation. The paper also discusses the strategy behind the constructive programme of Gandhi which kept the masses busy during the phases of non-confrontation.

Keywords: Strategy, Non-violence, Satyagraha, Struggle, Independence, British, Confrontation

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I. INTRODUCTION

Martin Luther had once said, "From my background I gained my regulating Christian ideals. From Gandhi, I learned my operational technique".

The Indian freedom struggle was undoubtedly one of the greatest liberation movements against imperialism and colonialism. The nationalist movement in India before the advent of Mahatma Gandhi has been described by Judith Brown as "politics of studied limitations"¹ and by Ravinder Kumar as a "movement representing the classes" as opposed to the masses.² The emergence of Mahatma Gandhi on the political landscape was not the mere instance of another emerging leader, but it was the rise of a whole new philosophy. The Indian National Congress which in the earlier days was mainly confined to the urban middle class started expanding under the leadership of Gandhi and soon became the mass-based organization of the country. Gandhi emerged as the national leader with his new techniques and philosophy and guided the destiny of Indian National Congress for about two and a half decades. South Africa had provided Gandhi an opportunity for evolving his own style of politics and leadership, for trying out new techniques of struggle. He knew the strengths and weaknesses of the Gandhian method and was convinced that it was the best method around.

Satyagraha: Satyagraha was defined by Gandhi as „a relentless search for truth and a determination to reach truth“.³ The technique of Satyagraha was first used by Gandhi during the resistance of Indian workers in South Africa against Asiatic Law Amendment Ordinance of 1906.⁴ This technique of Satyagraha was the most powerful weapon used by Gandhi against the British imperialism in India. Gandhi's Satyagraha was both a political technique to be used against British colonialism and a moral philosophy that claimed a utopian vision.⁵ Even though the passive resistance owes much to western influences upon Gandhi, his Satyagraha was in no way „un-Indian“.⁶ But it is also not good to undermine the impacts of western ideas on him. There is a possibility that if Gandhi had never read the Tolstoy, Ruskin and other western literature, he would have not entered politics at all and even if he had done so, he would have devised techniques different from those which he actually devised.⁷ Three things are of great importance in Satyagraha: Truth, non-violence and self-suffering.⁸ Gandhi maintained that the pursuit of truth doesn't admit violence because man is not capable of knowing absolute truth and therefore is not competent to punish others.⁹ The wrong-doer is to be weaned away from error through self-suffering by the satyagrahis.

Non-Violence: This had always been the founding principle of Gandhi's political philosophy. It was the cardinal principle of his message which was non-negotiable under all circumstances. It was not Gandhi's innovation but still he is remembered as the father of non-violence because he „raised non-violent action to a level never achieved before“.¹⁰ Gandhi was the first person to extend the principle of non-violence from individual to political plane.¹¹ Indian National Congress accepted his non-violent technique because it seemed to be practical as well as effective and only a non-violent movement could get the support of the masses. Not only this but also government find it difficult to take action against non-violent movements. Repression against the non-violent resisters weakens the opponents and strengthens the non-violent struggle groups.¹²

There are two main forms of Satyagraha in action, non-cooperation and civil disobedience.¹³

Non-cooperation: It means withdrawal of cooperation from the state by the people because the state has become

corrupt and cooperation with such state means cooperation with corruption.¹⁴ The main idea behind this strategy of non-cooperation was that the success of an unjust system depends upon the cooperation of the sufferers. If they continue to suffer the evil keeps on succeeding but if they begin to non-cooperate no such system may persist. To quote Gandhi: "Even the most despotic Government cannot and except for the consent of the government, which consent is often forcibly procured by the despot. Immediately the subject ceases to fear, his power is gone".¹⁵ The withdrawal of cooperation by the governed means a complete paralysis of an evil regime. Boycott was an important part of non-cooperation strategy; which included the boycott of social, economic, educational or any other institution, which has become corrupt or evil. Non-cooperation with the government was to be followed by cooperation among the people to provide alternative arrangements to carry the activities in progressive manner.

Civil Disobedience: According to Gandhi, A little reflection will show that civil disobedience is a necessary part of non-cooperation.¹⁶ It is a civil breach of unmoral laws; later it also came to be understood in the sense of violation of any law as a mark of protest against the unjust government.¹⁷ According to Gandhi, civil disobedience is the inherent right to every man.¹⁸ The civil disobedience becomes a sacred duty of the citizen when the state becomes corrupt, unjust and oppressive. The aim of civil disobedience is to destroy the illegitimate laws and to increase awareness among the people about evil and unjust rule. In civil disobedience a lot of prudence is required in the selection of laws to be disobeyed by the satyagrahis. The area and scope of civil disobedience should be limited to the barest necessity of the case. Civil disobedience is classified into four categories¹⁹:

Defensive civil disobedience: It is the violation of only unjust laws which are inconsistent with human dignity.

Offensive civil disobedience: In this non-violent and willful disobedience of laws of the state whose disobedience does not involve moral questions of the laws. Laws are disobeyed as a mark of revolt against the unjust government.

Individual civil disobedience: Under this only the selected individual disobeys a certain law. The fall of an individual civil resister does not affect other civil resisters.

Mass civil disobedience: In this type of civil disobedience, the masses as a whole disobeys the laws of the government, when the government doesn't describes the consent of the people to rule and has lost the confidence of the people.

Civil Disobedience is a quicker remedy for grievances and therefore needs to be handled with care as it involves danger. The leaders should give a serious thought to this powerful weapon which is to be used for worthy and general cause.

Another important component of Gandhian Strategy was „Struggle-Truce-Struggle (S-T-S)“, under which, phases of a vigorous extra-legal mass movement and open confrontation with colonial authority alternate with phases during which direct confrontation was withdrawn, political concessions or reforms, if any, wrested from the colonial regime were willy-nilly worked and silent political work carried on among the masses within the existing legal framework, which, in turn, provides scope for such work.²⁰ The entire political process of S-T-S was an upward spiraling one, which also assumed that the freedom struggle would pass through several stages, ending with the transfer of power by the colonial regime itself.

This strategy of Gandhi was based on the assumption that by its very nature a mass movement could not be sustained indefinitely or even for a prolonged period, that a mass movement must subside sooner or later, that no mass movement could be on the rise permanently, and that periods of rest and consolidation of breathing time, must intervene so that the movement could consolidate, recover and gather strength for the next round of struggle.²¹ A movement too long prolonged will be demoralizing for the participants because of fatigue, sufferings etc. Their capacity to face repression- imprisonment, lathi-charges and heavy fines-or to endure sufferings or make sacrifices is not unlimited. Gandhi launched movements only when he was convinced that masses would actively participate in it. Knowing the limitations of the masses he called off the movements whenever it was at its low ebb. Thus, withdrawal or a shift to a phase of non-confrontation *vis-à-vis* the state and its laws was bound to be an inherent part of his strategy of political action that was based on the masses. Gandhi knew the limits to which both the people and the government could go, and he worked out of his strategy accordingly.

During the phases of non-confrontation, Gandhi kept the masses active through his constructive programme, which was an important part of his strategy. It was primarily organized around the promotion of Khadi, spinning, village industries, national education, struggle against untouchability and boycott of foreign cloth and liquor.²² Constructive work was symbolized by hundreds of ashrams which came up all over the country, almost entirely in villages. His constructive programme was intended to restructure the social and economic life of all Indians. It was an attempt to strengthen Indian society socially and economically without depending on British power. The constant internal strengthening of Indian society and its institutions was seen by Gandhi as leading to the inevitable end of British rule.²³ Constructive work had also the advantage of

involving a large number of people. Parliamentary work could be done by relatively few, constructive work could involve millions.²⁴ Moreover, not everyone could go to jail but constructive work was within the reach of anyone who was desirous of contributing his mite to the cause of country.²⁵

The hard core of constructive workers, especially the ashramites, also provided a large number of cadre for the civil disobedience movements. They were the arteries through which the leadership kept in touch with the rural people. One of the secrets of Gandhi's mysterious political instinct was his contact with the people through his constructive workers with whom he maintained a continuous communication.²⁶

II. Conclusion:

The Indian freedom movement during the Gandhian phase was fought with a clear-cut and a long-term strategy. Gandhi knew that struggle against the British rule was not a one-step process; it was a prolonged struggle to be conducted in many phases and so he drafted his strategy accordingly. Gandhian strategy was not designed to overthrow the British rule but to generate such circumstances as to make their stay in India impossible. His strategy was designed to erode the legitimacy of British rule in India by the deepening of the political consciousness and widening of the mass base of the national movement. Though Gandhi was not the only reason behind India's independence but his philosophy of Satyagraha besides his strategy of Struggle-Truce-Struggle along with that of constructive programmes played a major role in bringing the imperial power to its knees.

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