

Gandhi's Concept of Non-violence & Its Relevance in Present Scenario

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Abstract: Gandhi, the notion of Non violence attained a special status. He adopted non-violence as a philosophy & an ideal way of life. Gandhi is however called the Father of non-violence. Gandhian non-violence is a philosophy & strategy for social change that rejects the use of violence. Non-violence is an alternative to passive acceptance of oppression or of armed struggle against it. Gandhi teaches that the one who possess non violence is blessed. He became an immortal spirit who guides through the path of peace & non-violence.

Introduction

Gandhian Philosophy on Truth and Non-violence (Ahimsa)

Ahimsa or Non-violence: Mahatma Gandhi was the exponent of the cult of Ahimsa or Non-violence. Force or violence, according to him, is madness which cannot sustain. 'So ultimately force or violence will bow down before non-violence'. Nonviolence is the personal practice of being harmless to self and others under every condition. It comes from the belief that hurting people, animals or the environment is unnecessary to achieve an outcome and refers to a general philosophy of abstention from violence based on moral, religious or spiritual principles.

He had waged war not only against British imperialism; rather he declared war on all the forces of unrighteousness, untruth and injustice, all the world over.

Gandhi demonstrated acts of truth and non-violence in South Africa. The non-violent protest of Gandhi got huge popularity. It was here that he cultivated in him the idea of 'Satyagraha', which he was to put into practice afterwards, both in South Africa and India. In South Africa, Gandhi ji endeavoured hard to secure for the colored people, including Indians who were domiciled there, equal rights with the White People. In this context he had to court imprisonment several times.

After arriving India, Mahatma Gandhi joined the Indian National congress, which was at that time more or less a social institution. He made Congress an organization, which was to play its vital role in the winning of the country's independence. Before he joined the Congress and took its reins in his hands, it was predominantly an organization of the Upper Middle Class people. Mahatma Gandhi changed it into a mass-organization, in which the peasants began to take an active part. He firmly believed that freedom can be achieved in a peaceful manner. He wanted all his followers to always maintain truth and integrity.

The principles of Ahimsa was practiced in all of the independence movements launched by Mahatma Gandhi. According to Gandhi, to move fearlessly into the dreadful jaws of violence is called non-violence. Thus, in Gandhi's concept of non-violence there was no place for timidity or cowardice. He considered violence to be preferable to cowardice. While commenting on this matter in his article entitled 'The Doctrine of the Sword', he says that, given a choice between cowardice and violence, he would prefer violence. But he firmly believed that non-violence was certainly superior to violence and forgiveness was far more manly than punishment.

How did non violence help in Indian independence?

Social Non cooperation

- Ostracism of persons: social boycotts of persons not engaging in non cooperation with the British government.



Economic Non cooperation

- Action by consumers: national boycott of British cloth and shops selling it, as well as liquor stores; rent withholding.
- Limited strikes, hartals, and economic shutdowns.

Political Non cooperation

- Rejection of authority: withholding of allegiance and refusal of public office by Indians.
- Non cooperation with government: resignations of government employment and positions, withdrawal from government educational institutions
- Alternatives to obedience: popular non obedience, refusal to disperse, civil disobedience of British laws, especially the salt tax.

Nonviolent Intervention

- Physical intervention: nonviolent invasions, especially of the Dharasana Salt Works, nonviolent occupation of the seashore to make salt.
- Social intervention: new social patterns, overloading of facilities (especially jails), alternative markets (salt, cloth) and institutions, such as ashrams and communities that cut across caste, class, and religious-communal lines.
- Economic interventions: alternative economic institutions such as salt manufacturing and the khadi (homespun) cloth industries.
- Political intervention: civil disobedience of “neutral” laws, dual sovereignty, making the Indian National Congress a de facto ruling entity in an attempt to sideline the colonial government.

Impact of Nonviolence:

Nonviolence is a philosophy, an existing theory and a practice, a lifestyle, and a means of social, political and economic struggle as old as history itself. From ancient times to the present times, people have renounced violence as a means of resolving disputes. They have opted instead for negotiation, mediation and reconciliation, thereby resisting violence with a militant and uncompromising nonviolence and respect for the integrity of all human beings, friends and enemies alike. Nonviolence provides us with tools, the positive means to oppose and stop wars and preparations for war, to resist violence, to struggle against racial, sexual and economic oppression and discrimination and to seek social justice and genuine democracy for people throughout the world. In a very real sense, nonviolence is the leaven for the bread that is a new society freed from oppression and bloodshed, a world in which persons can fulfill their individual potentials to the fullest.

Relevance of Nonviolence And Satyagraha in present scenario:

The acid test of relevance of works and views of a great man is definitely the application of them in prevailing conditions of time and space. Mahatma Gandhi is fortunately among those few great men in the entire human history whose individual life, works and views, also known as Gandhism, not only proved to be great and exemplary during his own lifetime but their relevance and significance remained intact after his passing away. He became the ideal hero for thousands around the world.

Basis of success:

For Mahatma Gandhi Ahimsa-non-violence was a Dharma, no matter if, for him, it was a plant of slow growth; and along with its activities, applicable in day-to-day practices, it was the means to achieve the goal. Satyagraha-pursuit of Truthfully imbued with Ahimsa was the weapon applied in political actions. Further, he loved everybody without any discrimination. Love is a value supplementary to Ahimsa. It is an ornament of the brave. In it everything is good, positive and beneficial provided it is not momentary. Mahatma Gandhi saw the ultimate Truth in love and said, “To see the universal and pervading spirit of Truth face-to-face one must be able to love the meanest.” That is why; his non-violence was that of the brave. It was not born out of cowardice.



2. Way of Satyagraha in current perspectives:

Gandhian approach would need both, courage and freedom from ill-will. Before launching Satyagraha and during the course of Satyagraha he was ever ready to negotiate and discuss. In the late twenties he was opposed to the exploitation of the textile workers of Ahmedabad by the mill-owners, but he was not for a strike to end it. In it, and in all other matters of dispute, whether they were small or big in nature or local or national in level, he advocated discussions, negotiations or dialogues, conciliations, arbitrations and adjudication as a last resort. He applied the same method in actions taken for the independence of the country. He inspired confidence and faith with his words; he was always dependable. Even today in changed circumstances it is necessary that when we talk of Ahimsa, non-violence and Satyagraha, we should bear this background in our minds. Today most the counties of the world are facing various kinds of internal and external crisis.

Due to unprecedented changes in social, political, economic and cultural spheres, awakening amongst the various groups of people has reached a high level. In such a state of affairs, can the way shown by Gandhi be relevant? Can his Ahimsa and Satyagraha be applied to tackle such kind of problems? Yes, it is possible. But prior to that, it is necessary to become familiar with the method of their application in changed situations. The application of both, Ahimsa and Satyagraha are not the exception in the law of change; they too are within the domain of it. So those in authority when dealing with serious issues in the whole world must have the humility to understand and accommodate the opposite point of view. They should have love and regard for those who cry for justice and rights and even those clamouring for separation.

In that case there would be room for discussion, negotiation and settlement. Non-violence and Satyagraha [pursuit of Truth] presuppose humility and readiness to understand even the most unpleasant stand of the opponent. This is applicable to those in power if they want to deal with problems non-violently. For those who cry for justice and separation, Satyagraha would mean non-cooperation without ill-will and suffering for their rights. They should be ready to compromise if their demands are substantially met by granting them the maximum without separation, because separation is not a permanent solution to any problem. It is a fact that non-violent Satyagraha sometimes takes longer time but causes less damage to people and property and does not leave behind any hatred or ill-will. Ultimately imbued with Ahimsa it is the pursuit of Truth and Truth always wins.

Conclusion

Gandhi's revolutionary thinking is still valid . His concept of non- violent Satyagraha is relevant beyond time and space . Nonviolent methods of action have been a powerful tool for social protest and revolutionary social and political change. Growth , Science and Technology has helped humanity in Horizontal Development and Progress , but it is partial truth of life , it will be wholesome only when we also start the process of “ Vertical Growth “ . Gandhian methods as such are still relevant for all global problems including terrorism and institutional conflicts.

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