

Study on Mahatma Gandhi's Satyagraha and Non-Violent Resistance



Dr. Manisha Shekhawat

Associate Professor, Department of English, B N University, Udaipur (Raj.)

Vidhi Patel

Research Scholar, Department of English, B N University, Udaipur (Ra.)

Abstract

Mahatma Gandhi was unique in this modern world to advocate non-violent methods for solving social, economic, political and religious problems. It is in this context that we have to examine the efficacy of warfare without weapons. There have been a number of times, however, when one or the other aspect of Gandhi's non-violent technique has been questioned and its validity and its practicability doubted. This essay tries to show that the technique of non-violence as advocated by Gandhi is the most effective and the least expensive method of solving social, economic, political and religious problems. Firstly, I shall detail how the strategies of violence and terrorism to bring about social, political and economic changes have now become obsolete. Secondly, I shall try to explain Satyagraha and its different forms and show how Satyagraha can be used as a powerful method of direct action in contemporary politics. This will also establish the effectiveness of Satyagraha as a device for fighting destructive ways and violent conflict.

Keywords: Mahatma Gandhi, Satyagraha

Introduction

In the context of one of the most destructive periods of world history during the first half of the 20th century, Mahatma Gandhi was able to practice ideals of service to humanity and so give hope to all human beings that it is always possible to live a life according to the highest principles and to engage in politics while insisting on its ethical grounding. When asked during the last year of his life what message he wanted to leave to posterity, he replied that his life was his message. What he meant was that he wanted to be judged by his actions. Gandhi certainly was not arguing that thought was insignificant to his life. On the contrary, he always found the time to meditate on his experience and ideas. At no time was his mind frozen and inflexible and he claimed for himself the right to change his opinion and judgment in light of new knowledge and insight. What he wanted, most of all, was to put into practice what

he found useful in 6 uplifting and advancing human beings and reforming unjust social and political practices. It was not accidental that he entitled his autobiography "experiments with truth."

Gandhi is remembered most for his nonviolent struggle against British imperialism and as a seminal figure in the fight against colonialism. The study of Gandhi's movement continues to illuminate the early challenge to the notion of empire and underlines how important India's freedom movement was to anti-colonial movements in Asia and Africa. It also pays tribute to a remarkable person who, unlike leaders like Hitler and Stalin who inflicted terror on humanity, gave hope to the world of the 20th century. But does Gandhi's Satyagraha movement have any significance for the world of the 21st century? Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Nelson Mandela have acknowledged Gandhi's influence in their political

struggles against racism and apartheid. They were attracted in large part by Gandhi's commitment to the use of nonviolent means to achieve his political ends. Nonviolence for Gandhi, however, was much more than an instrument in the struggle against injustice. As he conceived and developed Satyagraha or Truth-force, Gandhi made nonviolence the foundation for his method of engaging everyone in the pursuit of truth, whether the objective was individual or community development, or resistance against oppressive rule. Satyagraha came to cover a broad canvas of human aspiration.

Gandhi found the principal source of his idea of nonviolence in the Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain teaching of Ahimsa, and also in Christianity, especially in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Gandhi's definition of nonviolence signified not only not harming others physically, but also not violating their essence and respecting the truth in them. Nonviolence also embraced the larger notion of love and compassion. As an instrument in political struggles, Satyagraha meant the readiness to suffer injury, but not to inflict injury. Since there was no way to ascertain the absolute truth, no one was competent to punish. The use of coercion might produce calm and a truce in political conflict, but voluntary self-suffering had the power to transform a situation from confrontation to one where mutual trust and the courage to change one's attitude would be dominant.

The courage implicit in Satyagraha was the willingness to do what was morally right. When Dr. Sushila Nayar, Gandhi's disciple and personal physician, received the news of 12 Gandhi's assassination while she was tending the refugees at a camp in the Punjab, she broke down with sadness

and depression. She received a fitting consolation when she was reminded that her sense of duty and devotion to serve others was the greatest gift of thanks she could have given to Gandhi.

Objective

- Study on Mahatma Gandhi was unique in this modern world to advocate non-violent.
- Study on explain Satyagraha and its different forms and show how Satyagraha can be used as a powerful method of direct action in contemporary politics

Early Life in Gujarat

Born in Porbandar, a small town in West India, Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869-1948) was the son of Karamchand and Putlibai Gandhi. The family was well-to-do and owned homes in Porbandar, Rajkot, and Kutiana, Princely States, where his father often served as prime minister to one of the local princes. The state of Porbandar lies on the Arabian sea and was a center of trade with the rest of India as well as with Persia, Arabia, and Africa. His mother was Hindu but practiced many Jain beliefs. At 13, he married Kasturbai, Herself a thirteen year old.

He and his family made the decision to study law in England. When Gandhi wrote An Autobiography, in 1927, he was in his fifties and the leader of the Indian nationalist movement. His Satyagraha movement was already used successfully in South Africa and India. As we read his understanding of the narrative of his early life, there was little doubt that he selected those reminiscences that seemed to have some relation to his own development and the development of Satyagraha.

Although he learned to be tolerant, Gandhi felt that he did not yet have a living faith in God. But he was convinced, nevertheless, that morality was

the basis of things and that truth was the substance of all morality: "Truth became my sole objective. It began to grow in magnitude everyday, and my definition of it also has been ever widening. A Gujarati didactic stanza likewise gripped my mind and heart. Its precept – return good for evil – became my guiding principle: But the truly noble know all men as one, And return with gladness good for evil done."

At the tender age of eighteen, Gandhi left for England.

South Africa and the Making of Satyagraha (1893-1914)

have begun to call the Indian movement 'Satyagraha,' that is to say, the Force which is born of Truth and Love or non-violence. M.K. Gandhi, Satyagraha in South Africa, p. 102.

On June 12, 1891, Gandhi left England for home with mixed feelings. He was looking forward to meeting his family again but he was also sad because he liked London with its parks, vegetarian restaurants, and museums, and, most of all, he would miss his friends. Great sadness was in store for him on his return home because his family did not tell him that his mother had died. It was a small consolation when they told him that she was alive, however, on her death-bed when news of his success at the bar exams reached. One can understand Gandhi's shock and grief, especially because he was emotionally close to her. He constantly referred to his indebtedness for her part in shaping his character and relation to the world. During this period of grief he considered himself fortunate to have met Rajchandra, the son-in-law of the brother of his close friend, Dr. P.J. Mehta. Rajchandra was both a businessman and a poet who was renowned for having a prodigious memory.

Rajchandra regarded all his activity as a means to the cultivation of self-discipline and attainment of spiritual liberation. Dressed in a dhoti and an old cloak and turban, Rajchandra was indifferent to material pleasures. Gandhi said that he combined spiritual and practical wisdom in an almost perfect manner and thus became his inspiration. Rajchandra imparted to Gandhi his insights on Hindu, Muslim, and Zoroastrian religions.

One could not be indifferent to suffering. In its conception of universal love, Jain included not only human beings but also sub-human creation, including plant life. Philosophically, Jain taught that truth was manifold and that every proposition was true, but only from a particular angle. All views were partial. To comprehend reality, therefore, all views must be examined. Since reality was multifaceted and constantly changing, it followed that no statement could hold good at all times and in all ways and in all places. This was the source for Gandhi's acceptance that all religions were equally true from their respective standpoints. The notion that all truth was relative to our standpoint became the basis of Satyagraha y, his brother heard of a Muslim Indian business firm in South Africa which needed a barrister for an important case. In the demoralized state he was in, Gandhi was happy to take the offer.

Although Gandhi did not become a Christian, as his Christian friends expected, he acknowledged that he was in their debt for their education, kindness, and solicitude.

Preparing the Ground for Satyagraha in India

The world outside Champaran was not known to them. And yet they received me as though we had been age-long friends. It is no exaggeration, but the literal truth, to say that in this meeting with the peasants I was face to face with God, Ahimsa, and

Truth. M.K. Gandhi, An Autobiography, p. 344. Accompanied by Kasturbai and Herman Kallenbach, Gandhi left South Africa for London on July 18, 1914 to meet Gokhale, who was ailing in London. They arrived on August 6, two days after Great Britain had joined France and Russia in declaring war against Germany and Austria-Hungary. Gokhale meanwhile was in Paris for health reasons and was not certain when he would return to London. Gandhi was given a reception by his friends, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, and Mrs. Sarojini Naidu. Everyone was interested in how the war would affect the issue of Home Rule for India. Gandhi consulted the Indian students and organized a meeting of Indian residents in England and Ireland to discuss what position they should take. Although some suggested that they should use the situation of the war to press for Indian freedom, Gandhi persuaded the majority that England's adversity was not the time to assert India's political demands but that they should demonstrate their loyalty to the empire. They communicated to the Secretary of State their desire to assist in whatever humble a manner to the war effort. Gandhi and eighty Indians took a six weeks' first aid course; Indian women volunteers, among them Kasturbai and Sarojini Naidu, made clothes for the soldiers. Gokhale returned to London in October and had long talks about the war with Gandhi and Kallenbach. The illness of Kasturbai and Gandhi, who had developed pleurisy, caused increasing concern. Frequent relapses convinced British officials as well as Gandhi that to return home to India was the best hope for a cure. Sadly, Kallenbach, his German Jewish friend and comrade in South Africa, was not allowed to accompany him to India.¹

A large crowd met Gandhi and Kasturbai on their arrival in Bombay on January 9, 1915

His South African experience among poor, indentured laborers had transformed his life. It was not long before he was travelling third class, dressed now in shirt, dhoti, and Kashmiri cap. At an intermediate railway station on his way to Rajkot he met Motilal, a tailor by profession and public worker, who asked him to take up the case of third class passengers who were subjected to humiliating and insulting hardships as a result of a cordon at Viramgam because of an epidemic. Gandhi said that he first thought that Motilal was an impetuous youth but came to see that he was an example of a life dedicated to Satyagraha virtues.

The cordial relations between Hindus and Muslims at Lucknow were illuminated by Mohammed Ali Jinnah's remark that the "All India Muslim League stands abreast of the Indian National Congress and is ready to participate in any patriotic efforts for the advancement of the country as a whole."

Champanan

It was at the Lucknow Congress meeting that Gandhi met Mr. Rajkumar Shukla from Champanan in North West Bihar. Shukla informed him of the unjust conditions of the peasants on the indigo plantations in the villages of Champanan and asked him to assist them. For two years Gandhi had observed the condition of India in his frequent travels and had given many lectures and speeches. He now became more active in local labor struggles. On April 10, 1917, Gandhi and Shukla arrived in Patna station on their way to Champanan. Situated in the North West of Bihar at the foot of the Himalayas, Champanan had two towns – Motihari and Bettiah, and 2,841 villages which dotted the landscape.

At Muzaffarpur he met J.B. Kripalani, Professor of Muzaffarpur Government College, and Rajendra Prasad. Mahadev Desai, who would become Gandhi's secretary and translator, also joined him in Champaran.

There was an investigation and scrutiny into the facts of the case which were then presented at public meetings with demands for redress of injustice. But the clarity with which the facts were examined could not explain fully the strength and power of the Satyagraha movement. Gandhi's leadership awakened in the masses a sense of hope in their own possibilities of transforming their own lives and community.

Kheda district was not far from Ahmedabad. Its villages were also affected by the monsoon rains of 1917 and many were reduced to near-famine conditions. The land revenue law had stipulated that the land tax was abrogated when the annual crop was 25 per cent less than normal. As president of the Gujarat council, which served to advise the government about the hardships of peasants in times of crisis, Gandhi advised the peasants of Kheda in January 1918 to suspend payment of the land tax until the government investigated the matter, which was already investigated by officials of the Servants of India Society. Their report confirmed that the peasants were experiencing hardships, but the commissioner rejected the report.

The government rejected the suggestion and again applied coercive measures to collect the revenues. Setting up headquarters at Nadiad Ananthashram and joined by Kheda volunteers as well as his friends, Vallabhbhai Patel, Shankerlal Banker, Anasuya Sarabhai, Indulal Yajnik, and Mahadev Desai, Gandhi advised the peasants of Kheda to launch Satyagraha on March 22, 1918.

The experience of Satyagraha was foremost a political education for its supporters, an experience that was meant to awaken the desire to serve humanity.

After almost four months struggle, the campaign came to a surprising end. The Government agreed that if the wealthier farmers paid their dues, the poorer ones would be exempted. Meetings were held to celebrate their victory and honor Gandhi who was not entirely pleased at the outcome. He said that he was happy that Satyagraha had made the peasants stronger but he could not claim that the government officials had come to respect them. Displaying neither grace nor generosity of spirit, the officials reacted with arrogance since they knew that they lost very little in giving an exemption to the poorest farmers while continuing to get large revenues from the wealthy farmers. The poor were granted suspension of their dues but did not really get the benefit of this policy in that they did not get the right to determine who was considered poor. But the poor peasants, nevertheless, considered this no small achievement because they demonstrated the courage to resist injustice. Gandhi was hopeful that the Kheda Satyagraha had marked the beginning of an awakening among the peasants of Gujarat and the beginning of their true political education. In addition, he was confident that the Satyagraha campaigns would teach those who worked for the community to establish a close relationship with the actual life of the peasants, to identify themselves with the masses and find in the struggle their "proper sphere of work, their capacity for sacrifice." The lesson of Satyagraha was that "the salvation of the people depends upon themselves, upon their capacity for suffering and sacrifice."

Non-Cooperation and the Khilafat Movement

[At the Khilafat Conference] All agreed that Islam did not forbid its followers from following nonviolence as a policy, that while they were pledged to that policy they were bound faithfully to carry it out. In my resolution, non-cooperation was motivated only with a view to obtaining redress of the Punjab and Khilafat wrongs. M.K. Gandhi, *Autobiography*, p. 416.

Although the campaign to repeal the Rowlatt Acts and the massacre at Amritsar occupied the center of interest in India in 1919, Gandhi was well aware of the anxiety of Muslim Indians about the fate of the Caliph in Turkey following the defeat of the Ottoman empire and the Central Powers in World War I. He saw this as another opportunity to promote solidarity between Hindus and Muslims. He was heartened by the display of unity between Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs during the protests in the Punjab. After all, Hindu-Muslim unity was a central feature of his idea of Indian nationalism, and an important objective of Satyagraha. Indians did not need reminding how Hindu-Muslim unity had terrified the British in the Great Rebellion of 1857 and the resistance following the 1905 partition of Bengal

The Satyagraha against the Rowlatt Acts was the first time that the Indian masses were mobilized for the national cause, and Gandhi seized the opportunity to bring Muslim leaders and masses into the Satyagraha movement.¹ But while the Khilafat issue was understandably a concern for Muslims, it was not clear why it should have been a major issue of Indian nationalism. Bal Tilak and Pandit Malaviya did not share Gandhi's view of its significance

In India, Hindus and Muslims were building a relationship which promised a united front in the struggle for political reforms. Starting in 1912 with

an agreement between the Congress and the Muslim League, this cooperation matured with the Lucknow Pact in 1916, which presented a joint program of constitutional reforms.

When he called for a Satyagraha campaign after the Rowlatt Acts were passed on March 18, 1919, Gandhi traveled to Lucknow to ask Abdul Bari for his support. The result was that Hindus and 164 Muslims marched as brothers in solidarity during the Satyagraha movement throughout India with the cry, "Hindu-Muslim ki jai!" (Victory to Hindu-Muslim unity)

The Bardoli Satyagraha

The Bardoli Satyagraha between February and August 1928 impressed Gandhi immensely. The meaning of its success was not lost on him as he recalled how he had called off the campaign in 1922 when violence erupted at Chauri Chaura, effectively putting an end to the first All India non-cooperation Satyagraha. Gandhi's role in 1928 was more to record the struggle as he was still recovering from illness. He asked Sardar Patel to lead the campaign.⁸ The immediate cause of the Bardoli nonviolent campaign was the government's decision to raise the land tax by 22%, an amount that the villagers found excessive.

The government sent in gangs to terrorize the villagers: they seized private properties and auctioned them, and took away buffaloes. The volunteers were arrested and imprisoned for long terms

When the government demanded the immediate payment of the revised assessment pending an inquiry, Patel issued counterdemands, that all Satyagrahi prisoners be released, that all lands forfeited and sold be returned to their owners, that fair compensation be given for seized movable property, and that all punishments be remitted.

Perhaps, the most splendid lesson of all was the discipline of the Satyagrahis in preserving their commitment to nonviolence in the face of extreme repression. For Gandhi, the memory of the horror of Chauri Chaura could now be closed. Bardoli gave him renewed hope that Satyagraha could be effective at the national level.

Nonviolence and War: World War to Quit India

Ahimsa nonviolence with me is a creed, the breath of my life. But it is never as a creed that I placed it before India, or for that matter before anyone except in casual informal talks. I placed it before Congress as a political method, to be employed for the solution of the political questions...Nonviolence has brought us near to Swaraj freedom as never before. We dare not exchange it even for Swaraj. M.K. Gandhi, Complete Works, 75, p. 197.

As he removed himself from the spotlight of national politics in late 1934 to concentrate on his constructive program in the villages, Gandhi was mindful that the political climate in India had changed. Since the enthusiasm generated by civil disobedience and the success of the Salt March of 1930 had waned, Congress members wanted to test the usefulness of the new constitution for India enacted in the Government of India Act of 1935. Indeed, Gandhi encouraged Congress to participate in the elections that were scheduled for 1937. He was not unhappy to be once more on the margins of national politics because he would now have more time to devote to social reforms in Indian villages.

The deaths of old friends, most recently the death of his physician Dr. Ansari in 1936, caused him profound grief.¹ As he addressed the new situation, he was able without difficulty to accept a

smaller role in Congress politics and give his authority to younger men like Jawaharlal Nehru. Gandhi's focus on his constructive program did not mean that he was now retiring from the struggle for independence. A central pillar of his vision for India was always the character of independent India more than simply independence from Great Britain. Social liberation was as important to him as political liberation. He was fighting now on a different front, to use a military metaphor. He confronted the crisis of old age with no less activity than when he was young, but did not escape illness. From 1935 he suffered from high blood pressure for long periods, and, often on the verge of collapse, had to spend long periods in bed to recover. As he revealed his deepest feelings in his numerous writings and letters, we see the persistence of his faith in the ultimate goodness of humanity and his struggle to find Truth in the world. He began to speak more frequently and intimately about the presence of the Divine.

The struggle against untouchability made him reflect deeply on the ills of Hinduism and how to bring about reforms, but he was more concerned with what religion meant rather than specific religions. He found that the commentary in the Gita on the first stanza of the Isha Upanishad expressed his sentiments best: At the heart of this phenomenal world, Within all its changing forms, Dwells the unchanging Lord. So, go beyond the changing, And, enjoying the inner, Cease to take for your self what to others Are riches. But this increasing certainty about God's presence did not mean that he was not skeptical about his own search for Truth, or that he was unwilling to accept responsibility for his part in plans and actions. He questioned himself often about the ends of his campaigns, and was willing to negotiate and

compromise concerning them. At the same time, he insisted on the primacy of means over ends. The imperative of nonviolence²⁴⁹ became the central tenet of Satyagraha. As was demonstrated eloquently at Chauri Chaura in 1922, he was not afraid to call off civil disobedience when it became violent. Not even the prospect of victory was able to persuade him to change his mind. Gandhi had doubts about his role and achievements in India's struggle for independence. In making public the smallest details of his private life, his contradictions, and experiments with truth, Gandhi revealed that, although he remained hopeful that truth and love would triumph, he found the ideal of emotional detachment elusive.² His last years were full of mental turmoil. The intensity of Hindu-Muslim conflict, the difficulty of abolishing untouchability, and the many obstacles that the British placed on the path to swaraj made him at times doubt the effectiveness of his actions, and took their toll on his personal life.³

Indian Holocaust and the Final Satyagraha

Where were our values and standards then, where was our old culture, our humanism and spirituality and all that India has stood for in the past. Suddenly darkness descended upon this land and madness seized the people. Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi

The partition of India brought disappointment to Gandhi, but the horrible stories of civil war between Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs must have made him sick with despair. He must have wondered why love and truth had abandoned India during those dreadful months.

But, the extent of the violence that followed the call for "Direct Action" by the Muslim League, what became known as the Great Calcutta Killing,

the spread of communal violence to East Bengal, and later to Bihar and the Punjab filled him with indescribable pain and anguish. ⁱ Questioning his assumptions about Satyagraha and Ahimsa, he wondered whether nonviolence was the weapon of the weak or the strong.

Conclusion

Mahatma Gandhi parched and practiced non-violence throughout his life. He was killed by the bullets on 30th Jan. 1948. This was the end of a man whose life was based on high idealism and on principle of serving the humanity. Gandhi was unique in showing a new way to the solution of complicated problems of the world when non-violence occupied top most place in his life. He educated people the goodness of non-violence. He wanted the soul of India to blossom forth in all its glory. Non-violence has become very important today when humanity is reaching a point of no return due to nuclear weapons which are posing a danger to the very existence of present civilization. In these circumstances, the concept of non-violence as interpreted by Gandhi assumes ecological significance for its sustainability and enable people to live in harmony with nature without exploitation and stands as a solution and an alternative to violence and terrorism Gandhi's non-violence is relevant for the building up of a peaceful society.

Although Gandhi accepted that he could not always live up to his convictions but his god always helped him by giving him the power to guide the world on the path of love, truth and non-violence.

References

1. M.K. Gandhi, Satyagraha in South Africa, pp.65-68.
2. M.K. Gandhi, An Autobiography, p.180.

3. J.A.Spender, The Life of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, p.336.
4. When the Zulu rebellion broke out in 1906 Gandhi volunteered an Indian stretcher-bearer corps to the British effort. So, he joined the army with a small corps of 20 or 25 Indians. He remarked how grateful the Zulus were for their assistance as no European would come to tend to their wounds which were festering for some five days. He said that from their eyes the Zulus felt that God had sent the Indian nurses to help them. See M.K. Gandhi, Satyagraha in South Africa, p.81.
5. Ibid., pp.83-84.
6. M.K. Gandhi, An Autobiography, p. 168. 26 Ibid., pp.231-233.
7. Ibid., p.194.
8. Ibid.,pp.209-210.
9. B.R. Nanda, ed.,Mahatma Gandhi. 125 Years, New Delhi, 1995, pp.8-17.
10. M.K. Gandhi, An Autobiography, p.221; see also M.K. Gandhi, The BhagavadGita, New Delhi, 1980.
11. M.K. Gandhi, Satyagraha in South Africa, p.102.
12. M.K. Gandhi, Satyagraha in South Africa, p. 105.
13. CWMG, 8, p. 38.
14. D.G. Tendulkar, Mahatma. Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, vol. 1, p. 104.
15. CWMG, 8, p. 91.