

Gandhian Notion of Non-Violence and Conflict Resolution

Presenter: *Dr. Rabindranath Bhattacharyya*

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**AIC Australian Studies Senior Visiting Fellow 07 – 08
Hawke Research Institute for Sustainable Societies**

&

**Reader in Political Science
The University of Burdwan
West Bengal - 713 104, India**



"We are constantly being astonished at the amazing discoveries in the field of violence. But I maintain that far more undreamt-of and seemingly impossible discoveries will be made in the field of non-violence."--M. K. Gandhi

(Photos in this presentation have been taken from various websites)

Presentation Path

- 1. Non-violence as a basic element in Gandhian method of *Satyagraha* and its root in the tradition of Indian culture;**
- 2. Gandhian discourse as a resistance to the mechanism of power in the modern western society;**
- 3. Relevance of non-violence in resolving disputes;**
- 4. Non-violence and conflict resolution;**
- 5. The basic elements in M.K. Gandhi's notion of non-violence and the conditions that can ensure non-violence;**
- 6. The utility of non-violence in conflict resolution.**

Satyagraha and Indian Culture

- **“A stress on culture is a repudiation of the post-renaissance European faith that only that dissent is true which is rational, sane, scientific, adult and expert - according to Europe’s concepts of rationality, sanity, science, adulthood and expertise. ... Viewed thus, the links between culture, critical consciousness and social change in India became, not a unique experience, but a general response of societies which have been the victims of history and are now trying to rediscover their own visions of a desirable society, less burdened by post-enlightenment hope of ‘one world’ and by the post-colonial idea of cultural relativism.”**
- **Nandi, Ashis, 1987, ‘Cultural Frames for Transformative Politics : A Credo’ in Parekh, Bhikhu and Pantham, Thomas, eds., *Political Discourse - Explorations in Indian and Western Political Thought*, New Delhi, Sage, p. 238**

Nandy's observation shows:

- **A clear and conscious recognition of the socio-historical or social-psychological problems associated with the ideas regarding the future 'progress' of colonial and post-colonial societies in the context of the rise of modern science and rationality in Western Europe, and its intellectual flowering in the eighteenth century enlightenment.**
- **Colonialism and the "white man's burden" were themselves integral to this process of modernization.**

Gandhi identified certain features of this civilization:

- 1. “Its true test lies in the fact that people living in it make bodily welfare the object of life.” (*Hind Swaraj* p. 19)
In comparison to the Western civilization, “Our ancestors, therefore set a limit to our indulgences. They saw happiness was largely a mental condition. A man is not necessarily happy because he is rich or unhappy because he is poor. ... They saw that our real happiness and health consisted in a proper use of our hands and feet.” (*Hind Swaraj* p. 37)**

2. “Civilization is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty. Performance of duty and observance of morality are convertible terms. ... The tendency of the Indian Civilization is to elevate the moral being, that of the Western civilization is to propagate immorality. The latter is Godless, the former is based on a belief in God.”

– Gandhi, M.K., *Hind Swaraj*, p. p. 37 - 38

3. “That civilization must lead to the multiplication of wants is as certain as that two and two make four.” [Gandhi, M.K., 1928, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, Ahmedabad, Navajivan Publications, p. 12]

Since Gandhi made a firm faith in ‘Wantlessness’, as a desired human virtue, he believed, “Civilization, in the real sense of the term, consist not in the multiplication, but in the deliberate and voluntary reduction of wants.” [Gandhi, M.K., 1957, *From Yervada Mandir : Ashram Observances*, Tr : Desai, V.G., Ahmedabad, Navajivan Publishing House, p. 24.]

4. Modern civilization is devoid of morality and as such devoid of religion. In his *Satyagraha in South Africa*, Gandhi has explicitly observed how 'civilization' (meaning thereby Western civilization) was putting its immoral imprint over the life style of the blacks in South Africa.

Resistance to the increasing salience of a new mechanism of power in the modern western society

- **In his discourse Gandhi focused on an alternative path to attain truth different from the ‘rational’, ‘scientific’ discourse of the West that comes from Enlightenment tradition. Gandhi blurred the distinction between ‘public’ and ‘private’ reason countering that tradition.**
- **“The world rests on the bedrock of *satya* or truth. *Asatya* meaning untruth, also means non-existent, and *satya* or truth means ‘that which is’. If untruth does not so much as exist, its victory is out of the question. And truth being ‘that which is’ can never be destroyed.” – Gandhi wanted to create a new discourse of truth for fighting out Western discourse.**

“My problem is rather this : what rules of right are implemented by the relations of power in the production of discourses of truth? Or alternatively, what type of power is susceptible of producing discourses of truth that in a society such as ours are endowed with such potent effects? What I mean is this in a society such as ours, but basically in any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterize and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated or implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse.”

– Foucault, Michel, ‘The Juridical Apparatus’ in Connolly, William, ed., 1984, *Legitimacy and the State*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, p. 205

Elements of Satyagraha and the conditions that can ensure non-violence

- Meaning of Satyagraha:

- translated as passive resistance, non-violent resistance, non-violent direct action. Literally means *‘Eagerness for Truth’* and contains Truth, Non-violence and Self-suffering as basic elements.
- In *Harijan* (05.9.36.) Gandhi wrote regarding the essence of non-violence :
- “(1) Non- Violence is the law of the human race and is infinitely greater than and superior to brute force.
- (2) In the last resort it does not avail to those who do not possess a living faith in the God of Love.

- **(3) Non-violence affords the fullest protection to one's self-respect and sense of honour, but not always to possession of land or movable property, though its habitual practice does prove a better bulwork than the possession of armed men to defend them. Non-violence in the very nature of things is of no assistance in the defence of ill-gotten gains and immoral acts.**
- **(4) Individuals and nations who would practise non-violence must be prepared to sacrifice (nations to the last man) their all except honour. It is therefore inconsistent with the possession of other people's countries, i.e. modern imperialism which is frankly based on force for its defence.**

- **(5) Non-violence is a power which can be wielded equally by all – children, young men and women or grown up people, provided they have a living faith in the God of Love and have therefore equal love for all mankind. When non-violence is accepted as the law of life it must pervade the whole being and not be applied to isolated acts.**
- **(6) It is a profound error to suppose that whilst the law is good enough for individuals it is not for masses of mankind.”**

- **Relevance:** Non-violence is an essential element of any 'trust' – “a feeling of security and self-identity is acquired through developing a sense of security in responses of others removed in time and space.” (Giddens, A.) Violence may be defined as a deliberate act of aggression, doing physical or mental injury to others or creating a situation in which others are deprived of the necessities that otherwise they would have got. Thus lack of violence creates an assurance for the person interacting in a situation to cooperate with others.
- Non-violence also remains actively engaged in creating a situation that may lead to the emancipation from fear cultivating the capacity for sacrifice of the highest type in order to be free from fear. It helps in developing social capital of a society.

Satyagraha as the Gandhian Approach to the Conflict Resolution:

- **Development of Conflict Resolution Approach:** CR may mean many things – ‘conflict management’, ‘dispute settlement’ and so on.
- **Collaborative problem-solving approach to conflict resolution** seems to have its origins in developments in industrial relations in the 1960s, when the idea arose that more cooperative interaction between the parties could lead to a greater increase in productivity than that which ensued from more traditional forms of power bargaining.

- Then came 'alternative dispute resolution' movement that grew out of the adjudicative legal tradition and maintained the role of a third party to determine the outcome in accordance with prevailing norms.
- Later in the 1960s a new approach, focusing on human needs, became more fashionable. In this approach, conflicting parties are brought together to analyse the conflict in a non-bargaining way that looks at its deep-rooted sources so that the conflict can be truly 'resolved', rather than creating a situation where merely the manifest dispute is 'settled'. This movement was growing towards a Gandhian approach.

Satyagraha and CR approach:

Thomas Weber: Parts of Gandhi's conflict norms 'seem to have given rise to or have been derived from the integrative conflict resolution literature' –

– Gandhian Philosophy, Conflict Resolution Theory and Practical Approaches to Negotiation, *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 38, No. 4. (Jul., 2001), pp. 493-513.

- **As Thomas Weber views in the mentioned article:**

The first norm relates to goals and conflicts, and states that one should act in conflicts (for one's own group or self, out of identity and out of conviction); define the conflict well (state your goals clearly, try to understand the opponent's goals, emphasize common and compatible goals, state conflict relevant facts objectively); and have a positive approach to the conflict (give the conflict a positive emphasis, see it as an opportunity.)

The second norm relates to conflict struggle and enjoins one to act non-violently in conflicts (do not harm or hurt with words, deeds or thoughts, prefer violence to cowardice, do good even to the evil doer); to act in a goal-consistent manner (by including constructive elements, acting openly rather than secretly, and by aiming the struggle at the correct point); not to cooperate with evil to be willing to sacrifice (by not escaping from punishment and being willing to die if necessary); not to polarize the situation (by provoking the opponent)and so on.

The third and final norm relates to conflict resolution, and it directs that conflicts should be solved (do not continue the struggle forever, always seek negotiation, seek positive social transformation and seek transformation of both the self and the opponent); that one should insist on essentials rather than non-essentials (do not trade with essentials, be willing to compromise on non-essentials);

Conditions that can ensure Non-violence

- **Individual – Any conflicting situation should be faced with a commitment for self-suffering and a positive attitude to change the heart of the opponent;**
- **Political – where politics will not be bereft of religion and morality;**
- **Economic – Reliance on cottage industries and just distribution of wealth through Trusteeship;**

Utility of non-violence

- For Gandhi the appearance of a case in an adjudicative tribunal is a failure of the parties to settle the dispute and emerge as the friends. Adjudication generally precludes the Gandhian dialectic to lead to a win-win situation.
- *Satyagrahi* is not only a practitioner of conflict resolution skill but also is an embodiment of an ideal, a lifestyle that opens up truth as end and means both at the same time even if the condition of self-suffering may be a bit impractical.



Gandhi in Noakhali, 1946 - Amidst Fierce Communal Riot

Emptied of all but love...



- **Some basic references:**

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