

Assessing Gandhi's Views on Satyagraha as a Means of Conflict Resolution in The Contemporary Time

Dr. Abha Chauhan Khimta

Associate Professor

Department of Political Science

Himachal Pradesh University

Shimla, Himachal Pradesh

Email: abhackhimta@gmail.com

Abstract

Peace in modern times is defined as the absence of structural violence. However, to modern peace scientists peace is not merely the absence of violence but it includes the ways and means of restructuring the society based on justice and non exploitation. It envisages a society founded on values, culture, and way of life integral to peace- local, regional and global. Gandhi spoke of the futility of violence, love in the place of hatred, and non violence in an organized manner. This can be achieved only when violent relationships are transformed into non violent relationships. Satyagraha is the most important contribution of Gandhi to social philosophy and movement. It has emerged as a weapon of conflict resolution. Truth and nonviolence are the only pure means to achieve the goal of a peaceful world order. He regarded the Satyagraha movement as one of national self-purification and also a potent weapon to resolve conflicts. In the world of today, Satyagraha has become the only weapon for bringing about peace in the universe. As for Gandhi, it was not only a method of conflict resolution. He claimed it as a way of life. He believed that means and end are inseparably connected with each other. Satyagraha has great faith in the inherent goodness of the human nature. Gandhi believed that the simplicity of the Satyagraha is that even a child can practice it easily. The present paper explores Gandhian Satyagraha as a means for conflict resolution and its relevance in the present context.

Keywords

Satyagraha, peace, violence, justice, value.

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Introduction

Ends and means function as an instrument for the fulfillment of the demands of the individuals. Human purpose and ambition in life can be served by evaluating right and wrong or good and bad behavior. Ends and means go simultaneously. Suitable means always leading to the desired goal. Effective and capable means secure desired goals of human beings. Saul Alinsky discussed in a book *Rules for Radicals* published in 1971 that the ends entail the activities of how to get what people want to achieve the goal. In the chapter, Alinsky stated that the issue of means and ends is usually viewed in a strategic and pragmatic manner by the man of action. In the establishment of the means and ends theory, he proposed that organizers of communities should ensure that ends justify means so that they can bring the activists groups in the community together.¹ Thus the doctrine of ends and means go together and both are closely related to each other.

One of the major more profound and political thinkers of ends and means theory was Niccolo Machiavelli. He is well known for the phrase ‘‘the end justifies the means.’’ However, the facts cannot be denied that there are difficulties and confusions regarding the use of unworthy means for achieving worthy ends. Yet few thinkers like Machiavelli believed that any means to achieve that end is justifiable provided that both ends and means are noble and good.² Similarly in India the doctrine that end justifies the means goes back to Kautilya. His doctrine was based on the philosophy of self-preservation at all costs. He shared the same opinion as Machiavelli regarding ends and means doctrine. The doctrine that the end justifies the means was also propounded by the Marxists. Marxists argued that the root of social contradictions is the exploitation of one class by another class. They advocated violent struggle necessary for the removal of the class contradiction and differentiation and to establish liberty, equality, and fraternity in the society.³ Lenin also propounded the same theory. As he stated, ‘‘There have been many wars in history, notwithstanding all the horrors, cruelties, miseries and tortures, inevitably connected with every war, had a progressive character, i.e. they served in the development of mankind, aiding in the destruction of extremely pernicious and reactionary institutionsor helping to remove the most barbarous despotism in Europe. A means can only be justified by its end. But the end in turn needs to be justified. Whether an action is justifiable or not simply depends on what historical end it serves.’’⁴ Similarly to Stalin, the end justified the means. Fascism also claims that society is the end and the individual is the means. Thus thinkers like Kautilya Machiavelli Marx, Stalin, Hitler, etc believed that ends justify the means. The theory that a good end justifies all means is dangerous in practice and ethically unsound.

However, some compassionate thinkers did not agree with this dictum. For them, goods means are an essential factor for the attainment of the good end. As Aldus Huxley has discussed, 'Good ends can be achieved only by the employment of appropriate means. The ends cannot justify the means. The means employed determine the nature of the product. Men aspire to do well and yet so frequently achieve evil, because their means are bad. It is in the light of our conceptions of right and wrong that we can make real progress in private, economic, and political life. Violence cannot achieve anything except the inevitable results of violence. Any reform which requires violence for its imposition will fail to produce good results. Violence can produce only the effects of violence, counter-violence, suspicion, resentment, and more violence. Violence ends liberty, and has been the main cause of the rise of totalitarian and imperial tyrannies. The effects of violence can be undone only by acts of non violence. Thus by making use of evil means, even the well-meaning planners produce results that they did not desire. According to Huxley good things cannot be achieved by inappropriate means.'⁵ Certain Indian thinkers avoided any kind of extremisms and developed the theory-based of ancient Indian idealism. Mahatma Gandhi is the prophet of non violence and real prop under of the theory that means are as important as ends. Other humanitarian philosophers and thinkers like Buddha, Jawaharlal Nehru, J.P.Narayan and Ram Manohar Lohia, etc. also claimed that good ends cannot be attained by evil means or methods.

Gandhi and Satyagraha

Non violence was the main principle of Mahatma Gandhi's life. He advocated satyagraha as a potent means for the attainment of independence of the country. Gandhian philosophy of ends and means had an important implication on his theory of truth and non violence. Gandhi had a great impression of Bhagwad Gita in his life. Gita stressed on the detachment to the action. As it is mentioned in Gita, 'To action alone thou have a right and never at all to its fruits, let not the fruits of action be thy motive; neither let there be in thee any attachment to inaction. Successor failure does not depend on the individual alone but on other factors as well like the seat of the action, the agent, the instruments, efforts, and providence. By even a thousand artists blue can never be made yellow.'⁶ The term satyagraha was used for the first time in South Africa by Gandhi. He meant by satyagraha the moral, spiritual, soul, truth, love, and non violent force for achieving social, economic, and political evils and injustices. As Gandhi said, 'Satyagraha means fighting injustice by voluntarily submitting oneself to suffering. The judgment of the court was naked. It is not for a satyagraha to prefer an appeal. There is no room for legal defense in pure

satyagraha. What we see is not pure satyagraha, but its diluted variety. Such dilution is a measure and a sign of our weakness. When we have pure satyagraha, the world will see its miraculous power. I am quite confident of this. From this point of view of satyagraha, therefore, there was no question at all of preferring an appeal.”⁷ Gandhi first used the term passive resistance for protest against opponents. Later he rejected the method by calling it the method of a weak person. He said that, “I admit that the term passive resistance is a misnomer. I have used it because, generally speaking, we know what it means. Being a popular term, it easily appeals to the popular imagination. The underlying principle is totally opposed to that of violence. It cannot, therefore, be that the battle is transferred from the physical to the mental plane. The function of violence is to obtain reform by external means; the function of passive resistance, that is, soul-force, is to obtain it by growth from within; which, in its turn, is obtained by self-suffering, self-purification. Violence ever fails; passive resistance is ever successful. The fight of a passive resister is nonetheless spiritual because he fights to win. Indeed, he is obliged to fight to win, that is, to obtain the mastery of self. Passive resistance is always moral, never cruel; and any activity, mental or otherwise, which fails in this test, is undoubtedly not passive resistance.”⁸ Thus passive resistance was the technique to fight against wrong while satyagraha is a matter of faith or creed. He further stated, “ Satyagraha may be employed not only against the Government but also against society; it can be employed as between husband and wife, father and son, friend and friend; in short, this valuable weapon may be used for almost any reform in any sphere. It is a weapon that sanctifies both him who wields it and him against whom it is employed. Its rightful use can never have an untoward result. It is invariably attended with success.”⁹

Satyagraha as a Means for Conflict Resolution

Present day world is a strife-torn and conflicted world. World peace is most important in the present time to protect the world from the use of deadly weapons. Peace is a state of mutual help and cooperation. Conflicts have a social, economic, political, and environmental crises. Gandhi was very critical of the violence in any form. He stood against terrorism and social hatred. He regarded ends and means as convertible terms. He considered satyagraha as an effective method for the attainment of the social peace and harmony. The reason behind this was the fact that human beings are basically peace-loving and throughout their lives, they aspire for that. He preferred love and peace to maintain world peace. He was firm that permanent peace cannot be attained through violence. He suggested the adoption of love for attaining permanent peace throughout the world. Gandhian satyagraha can be defined

as a nonviolent struggle against social, economic, and political injustice and exploitation. He claimed that violent means or conflict inflict adversely individual or group. Whereas he believed that non violent struggle or satyagraha aims at ending tyranny and exploitation.

He recommended ideal satyagraha to work for social upliftment and development. Gandhi advised that satyagraha should live a sathvika (pure and truthful) life. All activities of his life should be based on truth. According to Gandhi, satyagraha must be a morally courageous individual. He should have the courage to oppose evils and to uphold the unity and integrity of the life. Gandhi gave principles of moral discipline to the satyagraha. He claimed, ‘‘The only weapon of the satyagraha is God.’’¹⁰ He asked satyagraha to sacrifice their lives for attaining social unity. He wrote, ‘‘Dying in the attempt to kill another does not require even a hundredth part of the fortitude and courage implicit in the suffering that a satyagrahi goes through, in the slow, prolonged torture that he calmly endures in facing a bullet without firing one in return. No one wields a sword strong enough to bear down the force of satyagraha; on the contrary, a man brandishing a sword of steel has to give ground when confronted by a sword sharper than his. That is the reason why the story of a satyagrahi is read with a feeling of reverence. One who is not strong enough to practice satyagraha is naturally tempted to resort to brute force, which is, in comparison, quite easy to employ.’’¹¹ He further said, ‘‘The satyagrahi seeks to convert his opponent by sheer force of character and suffering. The purer he is and the more he suffers, the quicker the progress. He must therefore resign him to being excommunicated, debar-red from the family privileges, and deprived of his share in the family property. He must not only bear such hardships cheerfully but he must actively love his persecutors.’’¹² Thus according to Gandhi, satyagraha is a powerful method for social reconstruction and development as an effective means.

Gandhi used satyagraha in social, political, and economic fields. He had firm faith in satyagraha since he believed that it was the most effective mean for the conflict resolution. He used it in his life for resolving conflicts and problems even in his personal life. He introduced the method in all spheres of life. Gandhi claimed that the relevance of satyagraha was that it can be used by single person also for achieving aims. This only depended on inner moral strength and purity of heart. Gandhi asserted that satyagraha can not only be practiced against the government, in fact, but it can also be practiced against society as a whole. Gandhi prescribed a spiritual path for satyagraha. He insisted on adopting religious and spiritual paths for invoking soul force. Prayer was the main factor for this and he included fasting in it also. As he said, ‘‘my religion teaches me that whenever there is distress which

one cannot remove, one must fast and pray.”¹³ The other forms of satyagraha of Mahatma Gandhi were like Hartal, Gujarat, Civil Disobedience, non cooperation, constructive program etc. for conflict resolution. Constructive programs focused on economical self-reliance, communal harmony, and removal of untouchability, unemployment, and illiteracy. These programs were positive means of conflict resolution and reconstruction of the social and economic structure of the society. He also recommended the adoption of swadeshi and khadi as the need of the Indian society. They were also the form of satyagraha of Mahatma Gandhi. As he said, “My swadeshi is khaddar, because I have taken my stand on one thing, and restricted my swadeshi. Manufactured goods we must not use goods from outside which we can usefully manufacture in our own country. That is not antagonistic to anything, but it is the law of charity beginning at home it is the law of charity that teaches us that, if we do not serve our family, our neighbor, we will not be able to serve our distant neighbor. Remember one yard of calico puts into the pockets of the laborers one pie. One yard of khaddar bought from the villagers, puts into the hands of the famishing villagers at least four annas. Make your choice one pie or four annas and decide for yourselves.”¹⁴

Conclusion

This can be argued that Gandhian satyagraha is comprehensive and universal in nature. This method is universally applicable across the world and the application of its methods is very feasible for all sections of the society. It can be employed by any person who possesses the qualification prescribed by Gandhi. According to him, justice can be achieved only by this.

It can be safely argued that in the present circumstances the Gandhian methods of satyagraha are the only viable option for the maintenance of the world peace. The use of Gandhian satyagraha is relevant at local, national, and international levels. His concept of satyagraha does not imply passivity, weakness, and helplessness.

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