

The Concept of Truth and Non-Violence: A Dialogue between Gandhi and Tagore

Chiranjit Bar

Assistant Professor

Department of Political Science

Barabazar Bikram Tudu Memorial College, Purulia, West Bengal

Email: chiranjitbar2016@gmail.com

Abstract

Gandhi and Tagore winnow the harvest of shared thoughts, ideas and memories keeping. They ripened wholeness of the colloquy, leaving the weightless in it to blow away. They dispense with the burdensomeness inherent in all sakshatkar, its leaden tare, its wrappings of ceremony, its packagings of custom. Truth and non-violence is basic concept of Gandhi but Tagore did not work out for build up a theory about Truth and non-violence. He has reply to Gandhi's views on Truth and Non-Violence.

In Santiniketan, Tagore and Gandhi have met between 1915 and 1941 overcoming all those interferences of corporeality. This meeting was in the unfretted flow of their thoughts as set down in letters. Gandhi and Tagore's feelings and ideas cooled, warmed, vaporized and condensed to give to each other through their letters, the gift of a friendship that could bewilder but never betray.

Keywords

Gandhi's views on Truth, Satyagraha, Non-Violence, Interpretation of Tagore.

Reference to this paper
should be made as follows:

Received: 13.02.2024
Approved: 15.02.2024

Chiranjit Bar

*The Concept of Truth and
Non-Violence: A Dialogue
between Gandhi and
Tagore*

*RJPP Oct.23-Mar.24,
Vol. XXII, No. I,*

*PP. 027-036
Article No. 04*

Online available at:

[https://anubooks.com/
view?file=3561&session_id=rjpp-
march-2024-vol-xxii-no1-
230](https://anubooks.com/view?file=3561&session_id=rjpp-march-2024-vol-xxii-no1-230)

Non-violence and truth might form the axis of the political principles of Gandhi and Tagore. They did not create the principle of political theory, but their way of life can be evaluated by a theoretical discussion that fleshes out the first principles of their political thought in difficult, even inhospitable, contexts. Michael Walzer, who was a communitarian political theorist, has pointed out that issues involving practical morality are best understood and suitably illustrated through historical cases, paying attention to the ‘nuances and details of historical reality’ and also pointing out that these cases can be frequently controversial. I want to attempt to study the ethical politics of Gandhi and Tagore in the context of historical experience within this frame. The following discussion of the essential principles of their politics, perhaps best described in terms of awareness, truth, and non-violence, situates these virtues as political values in the ambiance of protest, resistance, and tragic despair (Mukherj, 2019, p. 40).

We can find out ambivalence in the relationship of Tagore and Gandhi with mutual respect for each other and an everlasting personal bond between the two; they also shared many common zones of ethics and orientations (like the establishment of ideal communities or ‘ashrams’ rural reconstruction programs). But at the same time, their worldviews or approaches towards life and the world diverged on many important points. These had their effects on their concepts of nationalism and internationalism, truth, and non-violence. But before drawing any conclusion, it would be simplistic if we undermined the fact that ultimately they belonged to different worlds. The poet was a creative writer, and Gandhi was an epoch-making politician. So there would be some obvious differences in their approaches to various issues, temporal and eternal. “I do not belong to the present age,” Tagore wrote to Andrews, “the age of conflicting politics. Nevertheless, I cannot repudiate the age that has given me birth. I suffer and struggle” (Basu, 2009, p. 223).

Gandhi’s Experiments From God as Truth to Truth as God

Gandhi considers that God is truth according to his religious views. He said that in his youth he was taught to repeat what in Hindu scriptures is known as one thousand names of God. But these one thousand names of God were by no means exhaustive. Gandhi believes that God has as many names as there are creatures; he also believes that God is nameless and formless; God speaks to us through many tongues; we consider Him to be speechless; and so on. Further, Gandhi mentioned that when we came to study Islam, we found that Islam too had many names for God. Anybody will say God is love; Gandhi said that God is love. But he believes that deep in his heart, he used to say that God may be God and that God is true. If the

human tongue can give a complete description and conclude that God is the truth, But when he had experimented with truth, he concluded that truth is God (Bhattacharyya, 1969, p. 507).

When we have seen the fine distinction between the two statements, viz., that God is Truth and Truth is God, Gandhi replied that he had searched for truth after fifty years and found that the nearest approach to truth was through love; love has many meanings in the English language at least, and that human love in the sense of passion could become a degrading thing also. Gandhi wants to say that love is a word that has many meanings for many people depending on their point of view. According to him, love in the sense of ahimsa has only a limited number of votaries in the world. But he never found a double meaning in connection with truth, and not even the atheists had demurred to the necessity or power of truth. Gandhi said that atheists have to deny without hesitation the very existence of God—from their own point of view. For this, Gandhi said that truth is God, and God is Truth (Nazakit, 2016, p. 1169).

We can find out the truth by conducting scientific experiments. There is an indispensable scientific course of instruction; in the same way, strict preliminary discipline is necessary to qualify a person to conduct experiments in the spiritual realm. Because everybody has an inner voice that differs from each other, everyone should, therefore, realize his limitations before he speaks of his inner voice. Therefore, we have the belief, based upon experience, that those who would make an individual search after truth as God must go through several vows, like the vow of truth, the vow of Brahmacharya (purity), for you cannot possibly divide your love for truth and God with anything else—the vow of non-violence, of poverty, and of non-possession. There are several other conditions prescribed by Gandhi, but he told us that all of these are not necessary for us. These experiments know that it is not proper for everyone to claim to hear the voice of conscience, and it is because we have at the present moment everyone claiming the right of conscience without going through any discipline whatsoever that there are so many untruths being delivered to a bewildered world. *Young India*, 31.12.81, p. 427 (cited in Bhattacharyya, 1969, p. 510).

Satyagraha

What is satyagraha? According to Professor Buddhadeva Bhattacharyya, “Satyagraha has practically become synonymous with Gandhi. A reviewer of Gandhi’s philosophy aptly notes: “Gandhi’s supreme invention, discovery, or creation was satyagraha.” In general, laymen in India do understand that satyagraha stands for Gandhi’s way of fighting the British Raj. Satyagraha may better be understood

as a technique for solving conflict and a method for fighting evil, and it was another name for war with an alien government. But Dr. Joan V. Bondurant has pointed out that “Satyagraha became something more than a method of resistance to particular legal norms; it became an instrument of struggle for positive objectives and for fundamental mental change.” “Satyagraha is a way of conducting ‘war’ by means of non-violence.” according to Prof. Nirmal Kumar Bose. Hence, we can tell that Satyagraha is a war without violence (Bondurant, 1959, p. 3–4).

Prof. Nirmal Kumar Bose has identified the five choices of a satyagraha; these have been written by Gandhi in his magazine Harijan and Young India. Firstly, those who are subject to a particular wrong should alone offer satyagraha for the sake of remedy. Although others may not join, they may help by watching and offering friendly criticism or by advertising the cause and the campaign, if they consider it to be just. Secondly, a satyagraha can fight only for a moral or just cause. “There can be no Satyagrah in an unjust cause,” wrote Gandhi in Young India, 27-4-1921, 129. “Non-violence in the very nature of things is of no assistance in the defence of ill-gotten gains and immoral acts,” wrote Gandhi in Harijan, 5-9-1936, 236. Thirdly, a satyagraha campaign is basically open to those who have attained perfection in non-violence, but it is also open to those who are prepared to conform to the rules during the campaign. Fourthly, the campaign should preferably be conducted through an existing democratic organization with division of work in a camp and publicity. Lastly, decentralization of leadership is an essential part of satyagraha (Bose, 2019, p. 86).

Truth was the basic principle of Gandhi’s philosophy. Gandhi did not forget the truth his whole life. We can see the many Satyagraha movements that occurred under Gandhi, like the Chamoaran Satyagraha, the Kheda Satyagraha, and the Ahmedabad Satyagraha. He explained the effectiveness of Satyagraha in terms of the spiritual influence of suffering and love. The satyagraha love of his opponent and moral nobility disarmed the latter with his uncomplaining suffering, denied his opponent the pleasure of victory, mobilized neutral public opinion, and created in him a mood conducive to calm introspection. The two together triggered the complex process of critical self-examination on which a satyagraha relied for its ultimate success. Love was most important to a satyagraha, who could not quietly expostulate with his opponent without launching a campaign, nor was suffering by itself enough, for it had no value and was even counterproductive if accompanied by hatred and anger. According to Gandhi, love has psychological energy and moral power. He believes that we knew so little about the operations of the human soul that it was not easy to explain rationally how non-violence worked. Non-violence is another example of love (Parekh, 1997, p. 71).

Non-Violence/Ahimsa

We can find an intertwined relationship with the concept of truth in ahimsa. Gandhi almost deified the idea of non-violence, or ahimsa. "I claim to be a votary of truth from my childhood," wrote Gandhi. It was the most natural thing for me. Thus, the search for truth, for him, was the search for God. The name of the autobiography of Gandhi is *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, where he tells us that "ahimsa is the basis of the search for truth. I am realizing every day that the search is in vain unless it is founded on ahimsa as the basis." According to Gandhi, only through the practice of ahimsa might one hate and hurt the system of sin and injustice without hurting or hating the sinner. According to Gandhi, when we were uncivilized, came the stage of hunting; men began to live on chase; then came a stage when men were ashamed of leading the lives of a wandering hunter. Therein, we did not know the science of agriculture. When men learned the science of agriculture, they depended principally on Mother Earth for their food. Thus began the era of human civilization, which was only possible when mankind discovered the art and science of agricultural reproduction, a non-violent way of living. This is the path of progressive ahimsa and diminishing himsa or violence (Basu, 2009, p. 56).

Now it is necessary to describe the relationship between means and ends. According to Gandhi, means are nonviolence and ends are truth. In Gandhi's words, "Means and ends are convertible terms in my philosophy of life. If anyone told Gandhi, 'means' are after all means'. The reply by Gandhi is, 'means are after all everything'. As the means, so the end. There is no wall of separation between means and ends. According to Gandhi, besides, the end grows out of the means. "The means may be likened to a seed, the end to a tree, and there is just the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree." In other words, if we can implant the seeds of non-violence, we can see the tree of truth (Gandhi, 1946, p. 51).

But as a pragmatic leader, Gandhi prescribed a 'limited non-violence' for India because he knew that the practice of 'unqualified' non-violence was not possible. In Gandhi's words, "Though my intellect has fully understood and grasped it, it has not yet become part of my whole thing." Ahimsa does not simply mean non-killing. According to him, non-violence was almost uncompromising; he could not equate cowardice with tolerance. Although he believes that violence is better than cowardice, by his advice that where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence, he believed that non-violence is infinitely superior to violence and that forgiveness is more than punishment. (Basu, 2009, p. 57).

Gandhi's Views on Truth: Interpretation of Tagore

Tagore is not a political theorist; he is basically a poet. He did not build a theory about truth; he even did not experiment with the concept of truth like Gandhi. For Gandhi, truth is God; we can find out it through experimentation. Tagore did not find out the truth by the method of Gandhi. But at the same time, we can find out Tagore's views on truth in his several essays. In this context, the most important essays of Tagore are *Atmasakti* and *Kalantar*. Tagore had interpreted the concept of truth in these articles, *Bharatborsiyō Samaj* and *Swadeshi Samaj*, and we can find out a reaction of Tagore to the concept of truth of Gandhi in his essay *Satyer Ahaban*.

According to Tagore, the power of Europe and India is not the same; where Europe has applied enthusiasm to self-preservation, it is not necessary for us. Europe's reservoir of power is the state, that is, the government. The state takes on the burden of all the benevolent actions of the European country. Therefore, keeping the governance of this state strong, efficient, and conscious in every way and saving it from internal disorders and external attacks is the way to save the life of European civilization. On the other hand, welfare in our country is within society. It is not inconsistent (Tagore, BS 1312, p. 55).

Some differences have been presented by Tagore between European civilization and our civilization. Even so, he has accepted the science and technology of Europe for the development of our society; without industry, this society cannot sustain itself in the present day. In his own words, "Industrialization is important for every society. It will all fail if it is not obeyed. I have to admit this fully and say that India is the only country in the country. Not moving—where we do not directly experience our personal heart connection, our whole nature cannot be attracted. Call it good and bad, abuse it and praise it; it is true" (Tagore, BS 1312, p. 36).

According to Tagore, self-reliance is most important for the development of a nation. But he did not deny the scientific development of any civilization. He believes that love is truth, not greed. Tagore described in his essay 'The Call of Truth' that when love releases, it is from within, but greed is restless to achieve its goals by coercion. During the period of the Bengali partition, we noticed that we forced the poor to sacrifice not by love but by pressure from the outside. That is because greed strives for a particularly narrow result in a short period of time; the fruit of love is not for one day, not even for a few days; the fruit of that fruit is within us; that is truth (Tagore, BS 1425, p. 203).

With respect, Gandhi Tagore described Mahatma as having won the hearts of India with his love of truth, and we all bow to him there. We are thankful today

that we have witnessed the power of this truth. We read the eternal truth in words; we say it in words; the moment we see it in front of us is our moment. After many days, suddenly, this opportunity happened to us. We can build Congress every day; we can break it every day; it is within our power to travel from province to province in India giving political speeches in English, but we cannot build the golden stick of true love that awakens the dormant heart of hundreds of years in our neighborhood sacra shop. We bow to him in whose hands we see this rare thing (Tagore, BS 1425, p. 205).

Tagore has the question: What is the result if our devotion to the truth is not strong despite seeing the truth? As we accept the truth of love towards love, we must also accept the truth of intellect towards intellect. The heart of the country was not awakened by any ceremony like Congress; it was awakened by the touch of genuine love from noble hearts. When we can see this effect of sincere truth so clearly today, will we not believe that truth in the time of self-rule? Whom I respect at the opening, will we abandon him at the turn of the ceremony (Tagore, BS 1425, p. 206)?

Tagore said that Mahatmaji's voice is given the strength to be called by God because there is truth in him, so this was our happy retirement. But he called for only one narrow case. Gandhi said, 'Just cut the charka and weave the cloth together.' According to Tagore, this is neither the name 'Ayant Sarvatah Swaha', nor the name of the great creation of the new era. Charka cutting is very simple in one direction; therefore, it is difficult for all people. Tagore said that people can be made small not only by big mills but also by small mills; this can also be done by engine, also by wheel. Where the spinning wheel is natural, it does not harm but rather benefits. Due to the diversity of the human mind, where the spinning wheel is not normal, the mind can be cut much more than spinning the yarn in the spinning wheel. The mind thing is no less valuable than the thread. Tagore told us that clothing by charka for us is not Swaraj; it is not only based on the comfort of our clothes. Its proper foundation is in our mind, which, through its omnipotence and trusting in that self-power, creates swaraj (Tagore, BS 1425, p. 210).

Tagore's Views on Non-violence

Professor Sibaji Pratim Basu has critically explained Tagore's views on non-violence and classified them as 1) state-sponsored violence; 2) revolutionary violence; and 3) his support for non-violence (especially as it was preached by Gandhi). However, this concept too underwent an evolution with time. He said that Tagore's pen fired volley after volley against state coercion and violence. This was

mainly directed at the British colonial government. Condemning the policy of mass repression of the native youth by the police, he described it as an attempt to legitimize the 'sin' (Basu, 2009, p. 53).

We can see the view of non-violence in *Mukta-Dhara*, a play by Tagore that depicts the king of Uttarakut, Ranajit, injustice towards his subjects, like the British to Indians. In this play, a character named King desires to control the water of a mountain spring for his economic well-being and to treat his subjects with an iron hand. In everything that Tagore writes, love and non-violence find an appropriate place, scattered here, there, and everywhere. In his not only novels but also many poems, short stories, prose works, and above all, in his plays, we find that these two themes are very dear to him. Tagore has successfully portrayed his characters as upholding the values of love and non-violence in most of his plays (Vajpeyi, 2017, p. 73).

Further, the poet's resignation from the knighthood over the Jallianwala Bag incident, but unlike Gandhi, Tagore did not deify 'non-violence'. Not only in the case of Indian politics have we noticed an evolution in his concept, but also in the international scene, where he upheld the spirit of mutual trust and friendship. But Tagore accepts violence to protect mountainous violence. For instance, in the 1930s, when the fascist forces in Europe and Asia were out to crush all opponents at home and abroad, Tagore gave the call to those who were getting ready for the final battle against the 'demon' of the fascist forces. Secondly, his active and moral support for the Democrats in the Spanish Civil War and for the oppressed Chinese people proved that the poet morally approved of the means of 'violent' resistance of the oppressed people against evil in the late 1930s (Basu, 2009, p. 56).

Gandhi has Replied to Tagore in A Great Sentinel

Tagore said that truth is present in the voice of Gandhi, although he did not accept truth in the universal sense; he called truth in the narrow sense like a charka. He has a question: how will it be a key to the development of a true civilization? For this question, Gandhi gives a reply to Tagore in his essay 'A Great Sentinel': "When a house is on fire, all the inmates go out, and each one takes up a bucket to quench the fire. When all about me is dying for food, the only occupation permissible to me is to feed the hungry. It is my conviction that India is a house on fire because its manhood is being daily scorched; it is dying of hunger because it has no work to buy food with." Gandhi said that India lives in her seven and a half lakh villages, and the cities live upon the villages; they are unemployed. They take away their

wealth from other countries. According to Gandhi, the city people are brokers and commission agents for the big houses of Europe, America, and Japan, and the cities have cooperated with the latter in the bleeding process that has gone on for the past two hundred years. Given this situation, India is becoming poorer by the day. Gandhi believed that God created man to work for his food and said that those who ate without work were thieves; it is eighty percent of India. Hunger is the argument that is driving India to the spinning wheel (Gandhi, 1921, p. 1).

According to Gandhi, the call of the spinning wheel is the call of love, and love is Swaraj. He believes that the spinning wheel is the reviving draft for the millions of our dying countrymen and countrywomen. Swaraj has no meaning for the millions if they do not know how to employ their enforced idleness. Gandhi wanted growth, self-determination, and freedom like Tagore, but he considered that the attainment of this Swaraj is possible within a short time, and it is so possible only by the revival of the spinning wheel. It is a plea for recognizing the dignity of labor (Gandhi, 1921, p. 1).

Finally, we concluded that the two great personalities, Gandhi and Tagore, came from different backgrounds. With Gandhi's ambiguity and ambivalence, postcolonial writers might put forward the thesis of 'The Moment of Manoeuvre' by Partha Chatterjee, and Tagore's thought was his socio-economic background as a beneficiary of the Permanent Settlement' according to Arabinda Poddar. This is true for individuals like Tagore and Gandhi. Thus, to do justice to the works of men like them, let us evolve a methodology that would allow us to read their texts more contextually and give these contexts a kind of 'relative autonomy' without compromising, of course, our basic theoretical understandings, but at the same time, without seeking any premeditated definite explanations.

References

1. Basu, Sibaji Pratim. (2009). *The poet and the Mahatma: engagement with Nationalism and Internationalism*. Progressive Publishers: Kolkata.
2. Bondurant, Joan V. (1959). *Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict*. Oxford University Press: Bombay Calcutta etc.
3. Bose, Nimal Kumar. (2019). *Studies in Gandhism*. The Asiatic Society. Kolkata.
4. Bhattacharyya, Buddhadeva. (1969). *Evolution of the political philosophy of Gandhi*. Calcutta Book House: Kolkata.
5. Gandhi, M.K. (1921). *A Great Sentinel*, <https://www.gandhi-manibhavan.org/educational-resources/a-great-sentinel-october.html>.

6. Gandhi, M.K. (1946). *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule* Navajivan Publishing House: Ahmedabad.
7. Hussain, Nazakit. (2016). *Truth and Non-Violence in Gandhian Thought*. *JETIR*. December. Volume 3. Issue 12. www.jetir.org (ISSN-2349-5162).
8. Mukherji, Gangeya. (2019). *Gandhi and Tagore: Politics, Truth and Conscience*. Routledge: New Delhi.
9. Parekh, Bhikhu. (1997). *Gandhi: A Very Short Introduction published*. Oxford University Press: New Delhi.
10. Tagore, Rabindranath. (BS 1312). *Atmasakti*. Majumder Library: Kolkata.
11. Tagore, Rabindranath. (BS 1425). *Kalantar*. Viswa-Bharati. Library: Kolkata.
12. Vajpeyi, Dr. Kalpana. (2017). *Concept of 'Love and Non-violence' in Tagore's Work*. *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education*. (IOSR-JRME) e-ISSN: 2320-7388. p- ISSN: 2320-737x. Volume 7. Issue 4. Ver. I. (Jul. – Aug. 2017). Pg. **73-75**. www.iosrjournals.org.