

Importance of Gandhian Satyagrah in Modern Perspective

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Abstract

Satyagrah believes in the humanity. It also considers that human beings are Equal. It also believes in fraternity among people. It rejects the difference between the people and the concept of the spiritual doctrine of Hinduism that "all life is one, we are members one of another. Human life and Society are in a sense organic. One cannot injure one's neighbour without injuring oneself." Gandhi "Man should earnestly desire the well-being of all God's creation and pray that he might have the strength to do so. In desiring the well-being of all lies his own welfare; he who desires only his own or his community's welfare is selfish and it can never be well with him."

This means that human life, individual and group, social, economic and political, cannot be divided into separate and airtight compartments. Gandhi "The whole gamut of man's activities today constitutes an indivisible whole. You cannot divide life, social, economic, political and purely religious, into watertight compartments. It is neither Western nor Eastern. Many thinkers and activists in the modern world have begun to turn their lives to serve truth.

Keywords: *Truth, Thinkers, Selfish, Equality, Fraternity, Opponent, Individual.*

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Introduction

After his return to India in 1914, Gandhiji assumed leadership of the Indian national movement. He applied the technique of Satyagraha for fighting against injustice on many fronts. (a) discrimination on the basis of colour in South Africa, (b) British doctrine in India and (c) bad social practices prevailing in Indian society such as untouchability, communal prejudices and hatred etc.

At the individual level, it would lead to moral uplift of the individual which would be synonymous with the first sense of Swaraj. But in the context of Gandhian philosophy, the meaning of Satyagraha is restricted to the use of this principle at the political level, with a wider scope of its application. In other words, Satyagrah may be used not only to attain Swaraj in the second sense of the term, but for fighting against any form of injustice whether it is perpetrated by a tyrannical ruler or by tyrannical social practices.

Gandhi thought that while fighting for a just cause, a Satyagrahi believes that self-suffering is superior to making others suffer. Self-sacrifice is better than others' sacrifice. This would have a psychological effect on the wrongdoer and make him realize his fault. He would then be inclined to enter into a dialogue with the Satyagrahi in order to arrive at an amicable solution. Joan Bondurant distinguishing Gandhi's Satyagraha from its opposite, Duragraha, says that Duragraha implies stubborn resistance to the opponent's policy or actions prejudged to be ipso facto wrong. The Duragrahi regards truth, justice, and righteousness as his monopoly and does not allow the possibility, that his Opponent could also be right. The Opponent is regarded as an embodiment of evil; he is blackmailed and humiliated. He is not even allowed to explain his viewpoint. Duragrahi forgets the distinction between the wrong and the wrongdoer, and tries to destroy his opponent physically in order to destroy his misdeed. The Opponent is forced to accept defeat and concede to the demands of the Duragrahi. On the contrary, Satyagrahi enables his Opponent to put forward his point of view. The Opponent is allowed to prove himself to be right. Satyagraha takes the form of a fight between the equals who are given a fair chance to understand each other's views, and to discover the truth that would be readily accepted by both the parties. Once they reach an agreement, the enemy ceases to be an enemy. He becomes a friend and a co-worker in the pursuit of truth. Satyagrahi believes in the principle, "let and let live" ¹(Hind Swaraj)

The father of humanity, Mahatma Gandhi, was introduced to public and private sanitation which was also a part of his Satyagrah campaign since the days he spent in South Africa. For Gandhiji, "the drive for cleanliness in society was an integral part of the process in bringing about a casteless and free society." For him

everyone is his own scavenger. Gandhiji says, “The Scavenger’s work must be our special function in India.”² (Hind Swaraj)

Satyagrah belongs to or relates to all aspects of life. For sanitation and other hygienic work, Satyagrah is relevant and important. Reiterating the fact of making cleanliness a personal responsibility and the key to removing untouchability in South Africa itself, Gandhiji took to scavenging and propagated the advice among Indians to keep their lavatories clean and dry. Once he returned to India, his focus on sanitation grew stronger. He firmly emphasised on the need for education on hygiene and sanitation among Indians. and stated, “The Scavenger’s work must be our special function in India.” Gandhiji laid down the need for having clean water and air and the precise method.

Gandhian thought then began Satyagraha against injustice, inequality, hatred, exploitation etc. He also began his Satyagrah against the harmful impact of science and technology, untouchability, malnutrition etc. Gandhiji believes that some people have no faith in truth. Such people do not bargain their rationality and universal values for spirituality. They reject the binary and practise dialogue between the two. Gandhiji is naturally a prime example of such dialogue. In 1937, he explained why he holds the first mantra of the Isha Upanishad as the cornerstone of his faith. The mantra says, ‘The divine permeates the entire Universe and everyone has a share in it, which ought to be enjoyed, but with respect for the share of others’ Gandhiji argued that this is the essential spirit of all religions. Whether this is really the case is a different matter, what is important here is the Gandhian Vivek being used as a reading device for religious scriptures. This device consists of a value system privileging equality and is working here as the defining constraint on faith. With this constraint, faith cannot be used as a justification for violence and exploitation. Gandhiji goes on to hope that this mantra, “will satisfy the cravings of all philosophical communists”.³ (Hind Swaraj)

Gandhiji is not alone in such imaginative and brave attempts to go beyond the binary of spiritual versus rational. Such attempts to replace binary with a dialogue between the spiritual and the rational can be seen in the lives of Nehru, Tagore, Ambedkar, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan and Martin Luther King as well. What we need in the 21st century is a rational idea of spirituality, sensitive to the inner world of the individual, as well as to the challenges and issues outside. Only such an idea can help us get rid of the binary of rational versus spiritual and the split personality syndrome caused by it fighting from evils and devils, the prayer of truth is the strongest weapon. Gandhiji thought that while fighting for a just cause, a Satyagrahi believes that self-suffering is superior to making others suffer, and self-sacrifice is

better than others' sacrifice. This power forces or cajoles wrongdoers to change their mentality.

The merit of the Gandhian method of Satyagraha lies in introducing a new method of conflict-resolution which was found worth trying in many parts of the world. Time has seen many dictators bow down in front of the power of the truth. We may not accept it as the sole method of fighting against injustice, as Gandhi claimed, but it undoubtedly offers an important alternative to the hitherto known methods. It showed the way to oppressed people to pool their moral strength for fighting against a mighty Opponent. It is the power of Gandhian satyagraha.

The American civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s under the leadership of Martin Luther King Jr (1929-68) was particularly inspired by the Gandhian technique of Satyagraha. This movement sought to win civil rights for the black Americans who were left with no other weapon to fight against injustice and discrimination.

In 1991 the USSR disintegrated; it had come into being in 1917 but it went on to split into more than 15 nations. Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia were divided too. Bangladesh separated from Pakistan in 1971 too. The Scottish and Irish people have been fighting against Britain for a long time, and in a few years from now, they will definitely become independent entities. The only reason behind this is that in these countries, there is an absence of respectful feelings that could hold together in a thread of unity the diversities among their people. That respectful feeling is based on belief in each other, trust on diversities which originates from truth (satya).

Globalisation also produces asymmetries between those who are able to participate in the circulatory culture of the global and those who cannot, whether owing to deficits of purchasing power, social location or linguistic competence. In such a scenario, a politics of toxic hate can deftly instrumentalise the resentment of those left out of the festivities, feeding this resentment into a lased incendiary mobilisation based on ethnic or religious identity. The rootless are given roots, the anomic a framework of values, the insecure a target on 'Other' to annihilate. Modern times are an Era of globalization, but also a time of liberalisation and it is sure that we can become Liberal in any field with the help of truth. The fact is that the elimination of war and violence is not merely a question of external organisation, but more importantly a psychological and moral problem. Unless the hearts of men are converted and their beliefs changed no organisation can succeed in bringing about peace in the world. As in the religious field, so also in the political and international field, unless there is a rebirth and our fundamental values change, no external organisation for peace can succeed." Gandhiji was not merely satisfied with elaborating a non-violent method for the settlement of political and international

conflicts and redressing wrongs, but he also showed the way by which a conflict could be minimised, if not altogether eliminated, through a scheme of constructive work with its moral basis that minimises points of conflict. These schemes, as they try to eliminate exploitation of man by man, also help the democratic way of life. Take, for instance, his scheme of decentralised industry. To minimise conflict in the Economic field.” Satyamev Jayate —

Truth and faith are complementary. Both are interdependent. Where there is truth, faith is also there. Faith is a pillar of truth. Gandhiji had faith in truth, so they believed truth to be God. By moralising politics through the three principles of truth, non-violence and purity of means and fighting injustice and tyranny through to satyagrah and by his constructive programme, Gandhiji sought to coordinate and synthesise social, political and economic life, establish effective democracy and lay the foundations of a new social order based on justice and equality and pave the way for world peace. The 21st century is faced with unprecedented development of technology, the evolution of a virtual world parallel to and impacting the real one, and the increasing disintegration of available forms of relationships and support structures. Taken together, they have led to a vacuum expressing itself in ever-increasing stress, trauma and violence. Wise people could foresee it decades ago. Faith of any kind cannot function without “suspension of disbelief”. This is true not only of religious, but also of secular faiths centred on a nation, ideology or leader. When and how did Gandhiji get his idea of satyagrah? This question has been debated often. Some Western thinkers believe that he got the idea from the New Testament, especially from the Sermon on the Mount. It is true that Gandhiji was greatly impressed by the sermon. But he found that it only confirmed his own Vaisnavite faith. The song of Narasimha Mehta, “Vaishnava Jana to TeneKahiye” was his favourite and was often sung at his prayer meetings in Sabarmati Ashram. It communicates the same moral principles as are laid down in the Sermon on the Mount. But Christ held that his kingdom was not of this but of the other world. His teachings were meant to guide individuals to the path of salvation. He did not concern himself with political, economic or social problems. Gandhiji’s whole life on the other hand, was devoted to the solution of political, economic and social problems. He said that he was a politician trying to be a saint. He also said that all the concerns of life must be the concern of the searcher after truth, God. He did aspire to see, as he said God face-to-face. But that, he believed, could be done through the service of man. Even those who reduce science only to useful technology take pains to prove the scientific nature of their own “wisdom” while dismissing other traders of similar “wisdom” as unscientific. On one hand the scientific method is described as

insufficient, and on the other, it is used as an exclusive certificate. Among the faithful of such “masters” the personality is split between perfectly “rational” and discrete discerning at the pragmatic level and pitifully credulous at the spiritual one. Many thinkers say that faith and truth are separate. There is no any relation among them but it is not true. Truth and faith are strong relative faith is real when it is based on truth or reality. Imaginary faith is only romanticism or fantasy. Humanity at large must urgently find the practical methods of taking care of this split personality syndrome. It is not an exaggeration to say that our very sanity is at stake. Let us ask ourselves is it compulsory to totally surrender reason in order to have spiritual fulfilment? Take a little example of truth and faith. When a devotee of Lord Shiva treks hundreds of kilometres, carrying the holy Gangajal along the way to offer it at the temple of his village, Gangajal in his mind is not merely the water from a river for him, it is the water that has emanated from the locks of Lord Shiva, living somewhere in the Himalayas, before reaching his village through Ganga to enable him to offer it at his temple. The purity of Ganga water starts to flow from Lord Shiva, the supreme deity of his native place. It fills his heart with indescribable happiness. The peaks of the Himalayas, the Ganga, his village and Bharat all become one. While it all depends on faith. & Science rejects all these types of practice because Science believes and proves that the water of Ganga became over polluted and it is not usable right now. But it is faith who became gangajal as holy and pure. Who knows ultimate reality and ultimate truth? So, in modern era faith which is not & based on scientific reasons, is not based on truth. But it is also reality that Gandhian truth was is & based on his faith, that is soul force and spiritual power for him. Hence it is called that Gandhiansatya and truth and his faith are interdependent and complementary.

Conclusion

Satyagrah was not only a concept but also a practice for Gandhiji. We have seen how Gandhiji conceived the idea of satyagrah in South Africa. He thought it was a practical way of defending the diminishing rights of his countrymen settled there against those who wanted South Africa to remain a white colony. It is also there that he perfected the technique of satyagraha. Its essentials were worked out in South Africa. But Gandhi-ji has never claimed originality for himself. This may be due to his modesty or the desire of Indian thinkers to trace every new idea to their old wisdom. They consider themselves merely as commentators. In the 21st century, human beings are in great danger. The nuclear weapon and overpopulation are decreasing the balance of nature and the environment. In this crucial situation the idea of Gandhiji, especially the idea of satyagrah is more relevant. The principle of satyagrah is based on truth and non-violence. Some thinkers believe that the idea of

non- violence to solve political problems. The Vaishnavavites, the Jains and the Buddhists believe that ahimsa, non-violence is the highest virtue, ahimsa paramodharamah. Gandhiji had his own way of interpreting the Gita. He did not consider it as a book on politics or political and military strategy but a religious scripture. It showed the way to self- realisation through right action done as one's dharma, duty, without attachment to its fruit, favourable or otherwise. He has written a commentary on the Gita. In the 21st century the relevancy of Gandhiansatyagrah is continuous increasing. It is the most important contribution of Mahatma Gandhi in the all aspect of life. necessary to determine the limitations of satyagrah, because it is not useful in foreign policy of the countries. It is not useful or suitable for this Era due to Terrorism. Terrorism can be crushed by violence not by satyagrah. Satyagrah will not be successful in international affairs. Matter related to internal and external affairs of any particular country will not be finished by the use of satyagrah, but in other matters for example Environment crisis, atmospheric crisis, water conservation, Space science, Atom bomb etc, satyagrah is more relevant. By the use of truth and non-violence and by the mean of stayagrah world can be saved from a big crisis. Modern Era is based on liberalization and globalisation. These policies are proven the harmful for Indian Economy and social condition. So, the weapon of satyagrah is Infront of me in ordinary choice for us. At is important to remember that to use it in the satyagrah we truly should give up our desire and always ready to sacrifice."Swarajya is one of the most powerful methods of direct action, a satyagrahi exhausts all other means before he resorts to satyagraha. He will, therefore, constantly and continually approach the constituted authority, he will appeal to public opinion, educate public opinion, state his case calmly and coolly before everybody who wants to listen to him, and only after he has exhausted all these avenues will he resort to satyagraha!"

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