



RESEARCH ARTICLE

GANDHIAN CONTRIBUTION OF NON - VIOLENCE: A PHILOSOPHICAL AND CRITICAL STUDY

***Dr. Thomas Joseph and Jincy Joseph**

PG Department of History & Research Centre, Assumption College, Chanaganacherry

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ABSTRACT

The Philosophy of non violence is very important in the 21st century, because today we live in a violent world. Everywhere there is a mood of restlessness and a desire for change. It is absolutely true that violence can never solve problems or bring peace to the world. It is the law of our species as violence is the law of brute. But non – violence is a guarantee and is most efficacious virtue. If we apply the ideas and ideals of non violence in our day to day life we can establish the kingdom of God on earth. The present study intends to understand Gandhian contribution of Non violence.

Key words:

Non violence, Kingdom of God,
Nishkamakarma, Sarodaya.

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INTRODUCTION

Mahatma Gandhi was a man of greatness and goodness. His unique and towering personality had many facets. He was a great thinker, teacher, preacher, nationalist, internationalist, humanist and an enlightened soul. The essence of Gandhism includes in Truth and Non Violence. He identified Non Violence with Truth and Truth with God. Gandhi attaches utmost importance to Non Violence and says: "I am not a visionary. I claim to be a practical idealist. The religion of Non-Violence is not meant for the rishis and saints. It is meant for the common people as well. Non – violence is the law of the brute" (Prabhu and Rao, 1967). Non violence does not mean running away from danger but it means 'conscious suffering'.

Notion of Ahimsa or Non Violence

The word 'Ahimsa' is a combination of the Sanskrit word "himsa" with the negative prefix 'a'. It is usually translated as non – violence. Etymologically 'himsa' means to injure, to kill, to harm, to break etc. Then ahimsa means not to kill, not to harm, not to break etc. According to Gandhi, the word 'ahimsa' can be considered negatively and positively. Negatively, ahimsa means not to take the life of any creature with some evil and selfish intention. In other words avoiding injury to anything on earth in thoughts words and deeds.

In positive sense it is not avoiding injury to anything on earth. But it is a universal love. It is the climax of love and generosity.

Sources of influences

Many factors influenced Gandhi in the development of his concept of 'ahimsa'. First of all, the Hindu traditions had great influence on the concept of Non violence and it had influenced his life and religious convictions. "Hinduism with its message of 'ahimsa' is to me the most glorious religion in the world." (*Ibid*). The Hindu traditions go back as early as the Vedic times. In Taittiriyaopaniṣad we read: "Many there to be no dispute, om; peace, peace Hari Om" (Chattopadhyaya, 1896). In the Katha Upanishad we read the story of Yama telling Nachiketa that the vision of the self can be attained only by these who have not committed violence. According to this Upanishad, "penance, charity, straight forwardness, non – violence and truthfulness are characteristics of a religious man." (Joseph Kuttianickal, 1989) Therefore not to cause injury to other creatures is the duty and 'Sharma' of all men. The spirituality of 'Bhagavad Gita' had great impact on the development of Gandhi's concept of Non – Violence. The 'Gita' teaches the doctrine of 'nishkama Karma' to promote Non Violence. "A person who is born with the noble temperament is born with the following qualities. He is not afraid of anybody. He is pure in mind. He is non violent, truthful, gentle, without anger, detached towards the fruits of action." (The Bhagavad Gita, 1981) Other religions of Indian origin such as Jainism and Buddhism had their own significant

*Corresponding author: Dr. Thomas Joseph,
PG Department of History & Research Centre, Assumption College,
Chanaganacherry.

impact on Gandhi's concept of 'ahimsa'. Christianity also had influenced him greatly. He accepted the 'ahimsa' preached and practiced by Jainims and Buddha's teaching of compassion and love towards all living beings. The 'Sermon on the Mount' in the New Testament also influenced the Gandhian concept of Non violence in no small measure. He says: "then came the Sermon on the Mount. It was the new testament which really awakened me to the rightness and value of passive resistance. When I read the Sermon on the mount such passages as 'resist not him that is evil; but whoever smiteth thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also and love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you that you may be sons of your father who is in heaven, I was simply overjoyed and found my own opinion confirmed where I least expected it. (Gandhi, 1949)" Thus Gandhi was influenced by various factors and personalities in his pursuit of non- violence. However it should be stated that first and foremost he was influenced by the non violent traditions of Hinduism.

Character of Non Violence

Gandhi's Non – violence and truth are as sharp as the razor's edge. Its practice is more than our daily food. As we know, food sustains the body, we can say that Non Violence sustains the soul. There is a quantity and time gap in taking body food but non – violence, which is the spiritual food, we have to take continually.

The main characteristics of Non Violence are as follows.

- a. Non violence is the law of the human race and is finetly greater than and superior to brute force.
- b. Non violence is not only meant for the individuals but also for the masses of mankind.
- c. Non violence is not the quality of the brain, but it is the quality of the heart.
- d. Non violence is an effort to abandon the violence that is inevitable in life.
- e. Without much patience one cannot success in the practice of Non violence.
- f. Some think that Non violence is a weapon for the weak persons. But it is a weapon of bravest and strongest.
- g. Self – purification is necessary for Non – violence.

The value of non violence

We cannot think about Gandhi without his two fundamental principles that are Non-violence and Truth. He says: "Non violence is the first article of my faith. It is also the last article of my creed." (Prabhu and Rao, ?) He had given great importance to the non violent action. He was conscious about the drawbacks of violence. He had an opinion that "an eye for an eye will make the world blind". He writes: "Ahimsa is one of the world's great principles which no power on earth can wipe out. Thousands like myself may die in trying to vindicate the ideal, but 'ahimsa will never die. And the gospel of ahimsa can be spread only through believers dying for the caused" (Gandhi, 1942).

Why Gandhi gave some importance to Non violence and considered it as the supreme one among all other values. Because, He says: "My religion is based on truth and Non violence. Truth is my God. Non violence is the means of realizing Him." (*The collected works of Mahatma Gandhi*) He was not a man only says some principles but he was a man who

practices what he says. Always he had only one message that was his life. He thought that when we leading a life according to the principles of Non violence we are living with God.

Non Violence: A Path to God

Gandhiji was a man firmly rooted in Faith in God. He had a deep spirit of prayer. As regards his relation with God, he said that he could live without food for days on end, but he could not live a single moment without prayer. His aim of prayer was "Communion with Him" (Thomas Justus De Souza, 1999). The outflow of prayer has to express itself in the selfless service of other. Gandhiji was basically a contemplative in action. He had practices what he was teaching. In its positive sense 'ahimsa' means love. He was of opinion that one's words and actions should go together. Then only he becomes a man of God. He says: "The Non violent man automatically becomes a servant of God. The person who believes in Non violence believes in God, because God is Truth". (Prabhu and Rao) In Gandhiji's philosophy we can see that Non violence, God, Religion and truth are intimately related. Love is the corner stone of his philosophy. This love is expressed by serving the people of God. Because man is made in the image of God. So without the service of mankind one cannot realize God. Non violence is the best way to realize God. Gandhi's concept of 'Satyagraha' comes from this idea, the idea of love of mankind.

Conclusion

Gandhi's philosophy of Non – violence has perennial value. It is as sharp as the razor's edge. Its practice is more than our daily food. As we know, food sustains the body, we can say that non – violence sustains the soul. Gandhian ahimsa can be used as a basis for solving every problem of life. It is not only a kind of society but also a method of social change. It promises peace and bliss, harmony and concord, sympathy and co – operation. If we practice the spirit of non – violence, we can enjoy these fruits in our day to day life. According to Gandhi, violence cannot bring peace to this world. He had dreamed a non – violent society, state. It was his great ambition. His conception of this ideal society can be summed up in one word "Sarvodaya". That means welfare of all people. But unfortunately, nobody is ready to take this challenge. They say, this principle is easy to say but difficult to practice. But according to Gandhi every individual can practice Non violence. Because he is created in the image and likeness of God, that means there is a divine power in man. Through this power every individual can lead a life of Non violence, and can establish the kingdom of God on earth.

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