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SATYAGRAHA AS A MASS MOVEMENT IN INDIA

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Satyagraha as a Mass Movement in India

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Abstract – The reasons for which Gandhi chose the techniques of Swadeshi, Satyagraha, non-cooperation, picketing and boycott of foreign goods as opposed to open armed insurgency, must be examined in the context of the Indian socio-cultural ethos and the history of Indian freedom struggle. The historic- political situation combined with the rich tradition which produced nonviolent religions/ philosophical systems like Buddhism and Jainism gave rise to Satyagraha. In YOUNG INDIA (24th Nov, 1921) Gandhi wrote "The people are too peaceful to stand anarchy. They will bow the knee to anyone who restores so called order. Let us recognise the Indian psychology. We need not stop to inquire whether such hankering after peace is a virtue or a vice. The average Mussalman of India is quite different from the average Mussalman of the other parts of the world. His Indian associations have made him more docile than his co-religionists outside India. He will not stand tangible insecurity of life and property for any length of time. The Hindu is proverbially, almost contemptibly, mild. The Parsi and Christian love peace more than strife. Indeed, we have almost made religion subservient to peace. This mentality is at once our weakness and our strength. In this research work, I will highlight satyagrah's characteristics which made it mass movement.

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INTRODUCTION

Before actually coming to these concepts it would be in our interest to recollect some of the sources in the West that influenced Gandhian thought. In a reply to a question put by Rev. J.J. Doke as to the sources from which he derived his ideas of Satyagraha, Mahatma Gandhi said, "It was the New Testament which really awakened me to the rightness and value of passive resistance... The Bhagavad Gita deepened the impression and Tolstoy's 'The Kingdom of God is within you', gave it permanent form" C.F. Andrews in YOUNG INDIA (8-12-27) added that Gandhi called Jesus the Prince of Satyagrahis, and said he would not hesitate to call himself a Christian if he had to face only the Sermon on the Mount and his own interpretation of it.

From his Autobiography we learn that Gandhi, from a tender age liked helping others and alleviating their suffering through loving care and service, as he did for his father, when the latter was indisposed. In my opinion, what he saw of Christian missionaries of his times, and how they sought to allay human and all other creaturely suffering, (ignoring entirely their equally ardent zeal to civilize the Christianise" –terms entirely interchangeable, - the heathens in the orient'). their deep feeling of social responsibility developed the seed which already lay within him. In addition, Jesus with his self-sacrificing nature bestowing benediction on his murderers made him Gandhi's lifelong idol. Could it be mere coincidence that the 'Prince of Satyagrahis' was brutally martyred on the cross in 32 AD, beseeching God to forgive his ignorant tormentors, and the Apostle of Peace', Mahatma

Gandhi fell to an assassin's bullets muttering "Hai Ran"? If this be an effect of his childhood conditionings, then Gandhi alone is the only perfect Christian an individual who lived his life exactly by the precepts of Jesus Christ.

Replying to a question as to which book or person had influenced him the most, Gandhi replied. "The Bible, Ruskin and Tolstoy. In his Autobiography he mentions "Three moderns have left a deep impress on my life, and captivated me: Raychand Bhai by his living contact; Tolstoy by his book 'The Kingdom of God is within you', and Ruskin by his 'Unto This Last'.

From Raychandbhai, Gandhi learnt the art of remaining in godly pursuits in the midst of tumultuous everyday business, and never losing one's state of equipoise. Tolstoy in 'The Kingdom of God is Within you' and Christianity and Patriotism', protested against religious hypocrisy, perverse morality and industrialism which has a demoralising effect on the human personality. Tolstoy firmly believed that it was a crime to live a life of luxury and comfort at the prediction of millions of poverty stricken workers who spent their entire lives in the hellish atmosphere of slums. Gandhi too averse to idle luxury and advocated the worship of *daridranarayana* (the poor and underprivileged sections of society) through loving service to them. His Sarvodaya is a direct product of Tolstoy's influence. Gandhi was so influenced by Ruskin's "Unto This Last" that he translated it into Gujarati under the title of Sarvodaya', devoted to it an entire chapter in his Autobiography

"The Magic Spell of a Book" and summarised the basic thesis in three pithy statements.

It was self-evident for Gandhi that such people would not and could not use military force to wrest independence. Yet if they wanted to attain decisive victories, they had to do something more than vocally protest. The only possibility arising out of the pacifist situation India found herself in, was Satyagraha-- nonviolent direct action. Gandhi having discovered India's traditional springs of emotion, now had only to blast them free and direct the resultant flow into one mighty current.

The emergence of Satyagraha in India on a mass scale can only be explained in terms of tradition interacting with the objective historical situation. If we wish to find out why people so readily responded to Gandhi's call for non-violent resistance, as compared to a tined technique of violent insurrection, we must examine deeply the conditions that prevailed at that time.

As a punishment and preventive measure against the sepoy mutiny of 1857, the British had initiated a programme of disarming all Indians. Under the Indian Arms Act, 1878, all Indian's (excluding Europeans residing in India) were deprived of the right to have in their "possession any arms to any description, except under a license and in the manner and of the extent permitted thereby". Licenses were granted only to those Indians whose loyalty to the "crown" was incorruptible and beyond shadow of doubt. Subsequently this law, through amendments was made so stringent as to divest the public of even simple kitchen knives, under the clause prohibiting the possession of "any implement which is capable of being used for attack or defense, and is not intended for ordinary domestic purposes". Thus, Indians in villages did not have the basic tools to protect themselves and their livestock from predators. Instead of saving the lives of human beings the British pursued a policy of preserving wildlife to provide the Europeans the thrill of "shikar" while the native denizens virtually were used as live bait.

It was this mass of emasculated people that Gandhi had to lead to independence, people who even if they wished to resort to violence did not possess the necessary wherewithal. Gandhi realised that even if illicit weapons somehow smuggled into the country (as evidenced by the sturdy Sikhs of Canada and California on the Kamagatamaru) the average Indian did not have the foggiest idea as to which end of the weapon ought to be clasped in his hand.

Gandhi realised that a few Indians armed with antiquated weapons were really no major threat to the combined might of the British police and army which could exterminate the lot of revolutionaries like swatting flies.

An astute lawyer, from the contemporary events of his time he learnt that violent uprisings were not going to deliver Swaraj. Before Gandhi emerged on the Indian political scene, the arena controlled from 1905 to 1919 by extremists like Lajpat Rai, Bipin Chandra Pal, Tilak, Chandrashekhar Azad, Bhagat Singh and a score of others who believed that bullet for bullet was the only way of making the British take to their heels.

After having returned to India at the behest of Gokhale, Gandhi toured the length and breadth of the nation in order to obtain firsthand information of the prevailing condition. The conditions at Vikom, Bardoli, Ahmedabad, Champaran in particular, the country in general, convinced him that liquidating a few Saunders or Hardinges would not solve the problem.

He followed the scientific method of observation and experimentation. Upon analysing the situation and studying its history, Gandhi realised that the nub of British occupancy was economic exploitation; the British imperialist tendencies and the consequent urge to colonies developed as a necessity only after the Industrial Revolution; when they were compelled by the forces of production to locate fresh markets to sell their products. In order to ensure permanent selling outlets, they had to somehow gain monopoly, for which Colonisation appeared to be the only solution. Annexing India, the first step they undertook was systematically destroying all indigenous industry. Secondly, they sought raw materials at low rates from India, manufactured consumer products in their own mills at Manchester and sold them back to India (and other colonies) at exorbitant prices. Britain was basically a market economy, with international trade forming its backbone.

Armed insurgency being out of the question for reasons already discussed, isolated killings of petty civil servants in India would never shake the foundations of the British Empire, the only way to tackle them was through upsetting their economy. It was a tribute to Gandhi's intellectual prowess that after analyzing the genesis of the issue, he devised a nonviolent instrument (Satyagraha) to be wielded by a mass of emasculated and enslaved individuals, using only what they had in their psyche - insurmountable courage and a burning desire to be their own masters.

"Sar pharoshe ki tamanaa ab hamare dilon mein hai, dekhana hai zor kitna, bazuon katil mein hai" - Ramprasad Bismil and others like Iqbal and Tagore fanned the flames of patriotism in the minds of Indians, while Gandhi gave their zeal direction or mission - demolish the British through nonviolent resistance to laws that are morally offensive and unjust (Satyagraha, noncooperation), cripple Manchester and Leeds by boycotting foreign cloth, each person should fulfill his/her requirement of cloth through spinning khadi, small and village level industries manufacturing the basic necessities of life should be encouraged and Indian entrepreneurs should come forward to donate generously to the cause (Trusteeship). With Indian

capital, Indian initiative and desire for self-reliance, nobody would purchase anything foreign; where would the British store their finished products? In England, there would first of all be a glut of finished products, which if they could not consume, would consequently lead to recession. The spectre of two devastating World Wars being enacted in the international arena, would to a large measure aid and abet India's efforts towards attaining Swaraj, with a hard pressed war-torn Britain desperately seeking resources to finance its war efforts. If it wanted help from other nations, it would have to bargain, treating them as independent states, each having a collective will of its own. Gandhi in one stroke through Satyagraha and its attendant techniques had executed a masterly coup de 'tat, a bloodless nonviolent revolution.

Thus, Satyagraha in the Indian context is a technique which can be termed as the moral equivalent of war'. Nirmal Kumar Bose says "Satyagraha is not a substitute for war, it is war itself shorn of many of its ugly features and guided by a purpose nobler than we associate with destruction. It is an intensely heroic and chivalrous form of war".

Krishnal Sridharani broadly outlines some common features between war and Satyagraha process.

1. Both are forms of social action aiming at resolving social conflict.
2. Both come into being when negotiation and arbitration fall short of resolving disputes.
3. Satyagraha like war, lends itself to the training of soldiers and generals, to organisation, discipline and strategy.
4. A sense of 'romance' or chivalry and spirit of adventure or daring is common to both war and Satyagraha.

CONCLUSION:

The only difference that commentators have listed is that while war adopts coercion, Satyagraha advocates persuasion. Here we face a controversial point as to whether Satyagraha contains an element of coercion - nonviolent of course - or not. We shall judge that later towards the end of this only similarity that exists, in my opinion, is the basic assumption that certain radical social changes cannot be brought about, save by mass action, precipitating an emotional crisis, and that the humdrum everyday existence of human life needs shaking up in order that men may arrive at fateful decisions. Consequently, the issue must be suitably dramatized to arouse mass interest. Nonviolent direct action bases itself on the same principles of mass appeal and effectiveness of the resultant mass action as the tested ideology of war does.

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