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PHILOSOPHY OF SATYAGRAHA

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Philosophy of Satyagraha

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Abstract – Bondurant is of the opinion that the generic name 'Satyagraha' is used to explain away almost any direct social or political action short of organised violence. Is Satyagraha to be equated with demonstration, shouting of slogans, fasting and boycott? Is it a constructive philosophy of action, a way of conducting conflicts when they arise, or merely a theoretical system of end structure aimed at ultimately eliminating conflict? There are always a set of characteristics which clearly differentiate one type of action from others. In this research paper, Properties peculiar to Satyagraha is described and on the basis of an understanding of these fundamental principles. It will also be mentioned that which techniques constitute Satyagraha, and which lead to the adoption of outward forms that superficially resemble the Gandhian to technique but are really scarcely different from traditional methods of strikes and demonstrations.

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INTRODUCTION

From the aforementioned historical analysis of the genesis and development of Satyagraha, what emerges is that far from being merely an 'organised nonviolent effort in opposition', it is the cry of all persons who have felt aggrieved, a positive philosophy of action, following a definite pattern. Any movement following this pattern can be deemed to be Satyagraha all else is 'duragraha'. Our study of Gandhi's modus operandi in South Africa and India reveals a definite method, pattern, stages in the implementation of Satyagraha.

Satyagraha as a philosophy of action, can operate within any conflict situation, and is characterised by adherence to a stated truth by means of behaviour which is non-violent, often includes self-suffering, and seeks to effect change.

The various stages of any Satyagraha movement appear to be: -

1. Negotiation and Arbitration Before resorting to any drastic measures, every effort to seek redressal through established channels must be exhausted. This stage is characterized by persuasion through reason. If this does not work then Satyagraha could attempt to dramatize the issues at stake and get through to their opponent's unprejudiced judgement so that they may willingly come to a stage where they can be persuaded through rational arguments. In South Africa Gandhi did exactly this, when he started "Indian opinion", and published pamphlets, only in order to increase awareness both in the minds of the Europeans and the oppressed Indians. In India the
2. Preparation Readiness for direct action Immediately upon recognizing the existence of a conflict situation, motives must be carefully scrutinized, exercises in self-discipline initiated and the entire group informed about the issues at stake, appropriate procedures to be followed, and the strengths and weaknesses of the opponent. Once again, Gandhi's writings in INDIAN OPINION, HARIJAN, and YOUNG INDIA provided the basis for informing his followers about his strategy.
3. Agitation: This includes an active propaganda campaign along with mass meetings, and slogan shouting.
4. Issuing of an ultimatum If steps 1, and 3 do not produce the desired results, then a final strong appeal should be made to the opponent, explaining what further steps will be taken if no consensus is reached within a stipulated time period. A word of caution: the battle must always be waged with fairness, hence the wording and (manner of) presentation of the ultimatum should offer the widest scope for agreement, allowing for face saving on the part of the opponent; and

should present a constructive solution to the problem. This calls for generosity in victory, as Gandhi displayed during the Newcastle Satyagraha in South Africa. Pressure from the Viceroy of India (Lord Hardinge) forced Botha and Smuts to release Gandhi, Kallenbach and Polak from prison on 18th December 1913. Gandhi seized this opportunity to attack the Royal Commission of enquiry as being hostile to the rights of Indians, and declared that he and a band of followers on 1st January 1914 would court arrest by marching from Durban. Somewhere at this point of time some disgruntled white employees of the South African railways sensing that Gandhi's Satyagraha might help them, decided to enjoy a piggy back ride, and in a show of apparent solidarity went on a wild cat strike. Gandhi realized that the government had been pushed to the wall, and felt that Satyagraha in order to preserve its purity must not humiliate or embitter the enemy. That is why he called off the New Year's Day march. This forbearance gained more for the Indians (by way of respect and gratitude, resulting in peaceful negotiations) rather than if he had pursued his intended programme.

5. Having tried negotiation and arbitration, and issuing of an ultimatum the Satyagrahi must now initiate direct action. It is assumed that before acting, the Satyagrahi will have already made a study of the situation and noted what constitutes its bedrock, for that is what they must eliminate in order to topple the system. They can act in any one (or all) of the following ways:
 - (a) Picketing, together with *dharnas*, nonviolent general strikes and education of the public may be widely employed to combat social evils, like liquor, black marketing and corruption, as amply demonstrated by Gandhi.
 - (b) Depending upon the nature of the issues at stake, such actions as non-payment of taxes, boycott of schools and other public institutions may be initiated. A very important distinguishing criterion between Satyagraha and *duragraha* or striking merely to disrupt civic life, is the constructive programme of action, which is attached to the former, but lacking in the latter. Before attacking existing institutions, one of the disciplines that must be enforced is verifying whether or not the movement has made alternate arrangements with a view to providing services to its own members, to the public, and even in some cases to the opponent. Satyagraha campaign is at once thoroughly active, constructive, aggressive and synthesizing. That Gandhi followed this step is evidenced from the fact that before calling for boycott of foreign clothes, he made home spun khadi the alternative for clothing

millions, each individual would be self-reliant and not look to Manchester to protect his/her body from the vagaries of nature. Before asking students to boycott schools and colleges, he ensured that his *Nai Talim* and D.A.V. institutions would prove a viable alternative to the Western educational system imported from Eton, Cambridge and Oxford. Those who renounced their professions or refused to work in European owned factories were accommodated in the struggle for Swaraj. Before boycotting British industry, he bolstered the class of Indian entrepreneurs using Indian capital and through the concept of trusteeship introduced a theory of the social responsibility of the corporate sector. Thus, at each stage, before striking at roots of existing pernicious institutions, Gandhi had a constructive alternative, a seed he would plant in place of the uprooted oak of colonialism and racism.

Similarly, in contemporary times, those who claim to follow the method of Satyagraha, say in a factory strike, before taking on the might of the owners' capital, must ensure that in the event of the strike carrying on for an indefinite period of time, or their losing, (for whatever reasons), they must have some economically viable alternative occupation which can provide the workers with some means of livelihood, temporarily or permanently. This serves a dual purpose; firstly it will prevent the families from starving to death in the event of a lockout, and secondly, once the mass of workers realize that they are no longer entirely dependent on the factory for earning their wages, they are bound to function more fearlessly, tirelessly and with relentless vigour to achieve their chosen end; nobody will be able to break their unity. Satyagraha is not a spontaneous uprising, fueled by blind wrath or despair, but a cold calculated programme of action formulated after taking into consideration every nuance of the situation, past, present and future.

Great caution and foresight should be exercised in the selection of laws to be contravened; such laws should either be central to the grievance or symbolic if they are to be of any propaganda value. The aim should be to place the opponent in a 'heads I win tails you lose' position, wherein he is persuaded by the force of public opinion to negotiate. Thus, Gandhi in his Dandi March chose to break the salt law because salt is the lowest common denominator equally used by the rich and the poor. This case was symbolic in so far as salt being a necessary ingredient for life. If the British persisted in imposing the salt tax, through repressive techniques, it was inhuman; if on the other hand, they took no action against the Satyagrahis, it was a reflection on their administration - which would be projected as too weak to maintain law and order.

In addition to being broad based, inculcating what was good in all religions and dispensing with the impertinent, Gandhi tried to moralize religion. Far from being esoteric, he said, "For me morals, ethics and

religion are convertible terms. A moral life without reference to religion is like a house built on sand. And religion divorced from morality is like sounding brass' good only for making a noise and breaking heads. Thus, Gandhi's religion is dharma, or the cosmic law which sustains the universe. By religion, Gandhi meant both truth and nonviolence. In other words, religion is a genus, of which Truth and Ahimsa are species. This is what Gandhi meant when he said "There is no other religion than truth #26 ('*Satyannasti parodharmah*'). In the scale of values, Truth means. (Satya) is higher than Ahimsa. Hence, he regards Satya as the end and Ahimsa as the Nonviolence in contained in Truth, and realization of this truth is religion.

The concept of Satya is fundamental to Gandhian thought, intact his whole life may be viewed as an existential quest for Truth. Gandhi affirms an isomorphism, between Satya (truth) and Sat (Reality). He has no difficulty in describing himself as an Advaitin. "I believe in Advaita, I believe in the essential unity of man and for that matter all that lives"²⁷ or "I believe in the absolute oneness of God and therefore also of humanity. What though we have so many bodies? We have but one soul. The rays of the sun are many through refraction. But they have the same source". These and a score of similar passages from Gandhiji's writings highlight the fact that he was utterly faithful to the Advaita tradition, whose basic insight is that reality is one and non-dual being "ekam sat, advityam" (Everything is Being (sat), all else is illusion.).

Discussing the relation between Satya and Ahimsa Gandhi remarked. "They are like the two sides of a coin, or rather a smooth unstamped metallic disc. Who can tell which is the obverse and which is the reverse". Ahimsa is the means leading to the realization of Truth as the goal; Since means and ends are convertible terms in Gandhi's philosophy of life, to practice Ahimsa is to realise Truth, and to realize Truth is to practice Ahimsa - the attainment of one also involves the realization of the other. By now it is evident that Gandhi is very much an Advaitin, as he himself says "I believe in Advaita. I believe in the essential unity of man and, for that matter of all that lives". The basic presupposition of Advaita Vedānta is the indivisibility of Truth and the essential unity of life; Gandhi too makes no distinction between the self Ātman and Truth or God-- The self within man is at one with the essence of reality - Sat. If the kernel of an individual the higher self is the Atman, which is at one with Sat (the Truth/Being) then to inflict deliberate violence on another is to injure God or undermine Truth and causing suffering to others amounts to violating one's higher self or Atman. That is why Gandhi, if he were to take his religio-ethical traditions to their weapon logical conclusions, would have to accept Ahimsa as the only at his disposal. With absolutely no desire of accusing Gandhiji of being an opportunist, I shall describe what a brilliant strategist and tactician he was. His Bharatdarshan yatra made him aware of the fact that if any armed insurgency were resorted to, the entire

British army, navy and air force would wipe him and his hand of dedicated patriots off the face of the earth. Finding no other means to tackle the juggernaut of tyranny, he decided to devise means of raising public opinion against outrage. There could be nothing better than reacting non-violently to police brutalities to fan up sympathy for their cause, as apparent from the march to Dharasana Salt Works, where twenty-five hundred volunteers advanced on the salt works, one wave at a time, only to confront lathi wielding policemen. Webb Miller a well-known columnist recorded the scene for posterity as "Suddenly at a word of command, scores of native policemen rushed upon the advancing marchers and rained blows on their heads with their steel-shod lathis. Not one of the marchers even raised an arm to fend off the blows. They went down like ten-pins. From where I stood, I heard the sickening whack of the clubs on unprotected skulls. The waiting crowd of marchers groaned and sucked in their breath in sympathetic pain at every blow. Those struck down fell sprawling, unconscious or writhing with fractured skulls or broken shoulders. ... The survivors, without breaking ranks, silently and doggedly marched on until struck down.....".

The British were censured the world over for their brutality while Gandhi and his band of Satyagrahis won accolades for their steadfastness and tenacity. Gandhi through choosing to break the salt law put the British in a "Head I win Tails you lose position". Salt being the lowest common denominator, in so far as both the super-rich and abjectly poor require it in order to survive, touched a common chord and involved everybody in the struggle. The British were placed in an awkward position - If they did not react to Gandhi disobeying the salt law or any other similar regulation. it only proved they were incapable of maintaining law and order, and consequently should relinquish power; but if they struck in reprisal, as evidenced in Jalliwala Bagh and the Salt satyagraha, they were brutal, a denying human being the bare minimum to survive. Through his nonviolent Satyagraha Gandhi ably unmasked the hypocrisy of Britain which fancied itself to be preserver of human rights. It was indeed a cruel paradox. On the one hand they were fighting the combined forces of Nazism and fascist, while on the other they were brutalizing the inhabitants of their own colonies. Either way the British were not fit to rule or be called human beings.

Gandhi's Ahimsa and Satyagraha did not stop at merely exposing the hollowness of British pretensions to humanism. The truth was that if they were not willing to bend their knees before the tyranny of Hitler, they had no right to enslave Indians. Gandhi thus through Satyagraha endeavoured to turn the oppressors out and liberate India. It is a tribute to his power of analytical reasoning that Gandhi under his programme of Satyagraha subsumed techniques like dharna, swadeshi and boycott of foreign goods. Already mentioned elsewhere in this Part, Gandhi

upon returning from South Africa spent time studying the situation before arriving at the conclusion that Britain's interest in India was primarily economic, i.e., it involved purchasing raw material from colonies, processing them in England and selling them back to the colonies at astronomical prices. All modern amenities like railways, electricity and factories were established only to subscribe to British economic interests, and not fulfil altruistic motives. Gandhi realized that to these factories were set up in India only because labour was cheap. That is why he enjoined Indians to refuse work in British enterprises, as also to refuse to purchase any foreign goods. That much would prove more than sufficient to cripple the economy of the island nation. There was absolutely no need for any sort of violence. "Abstinence for a great cause (swaraj)" summed up the negative connotation of Ahimsa.

CONCLUSION:

As in extensive and intensive preparations for violent combat, in Satyagraha too, much depends upon the extent of discipline, quality of leadership and steadfastness of purpose. Fasting, strikes and demonstrations which at times may be used as tools of Satyagraha campaigns, are in themselves nothing more than names of actions. Not every movement is ipso facto Satyagraha, merely because it abjures physical violence. Having shown that Satyagraha is both a positive, constructive philosophy of action, and a world view or way of life. I shall now discuss the foundations of this world view.

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