

Relevance of Gandhi's Satyagraha Movement

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Abstract – It would not be an exaggeration if we claim that ‘Satyagraha’ is the quintessence of Gandhian thought. The idea of Satyagraha and its practice were the centre of Gandhi’s life as well as his contribution to the human race. As a champion of truth and non-violence Gandhi advocates Satyagraha as a force of individual and communities. For Gandhi, this force can be employed in all the spheres where human beings find a place. Satyagraha is merely assertion of right and correct where some wrong or bad is being done. Thus, Satyagraha indicates truth force against the evil force. Gandhi never thought of a revolution. It is the soul force. Accordingly, it is the force of the spirit. Besides, it is the technique of non-violence.

Keywords: Non-Violence, Satyagraha, Truth.

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Satyagraha and non-violence are two important principles of Gandhi's thought and deeds. Since he strongly advocates of an ideal human state and opposes to the state of coercion and force. Quite truly, Gandhi evolves the method of *Satyagraha* as a missile to succeed political freedom. His *Satyagraha* will survive well into the new century. It is a worthy object of historical and political analysis, albeit he was not a political philosopher. As a leading spiritual leader, Gandhi attributes *non-violence* and *Satyagraha* against the forces of violence. This paper is an attempt to understand and interpret Gandhi's *Satyagraha* in such a manner so that political action is continuous with good deeds and there are no wrong deeds, evils of inequality, narrow nationalism and oppressive state. Even it supports a true philosophy of social welfare state, i.e. the modern idea of civil society where there is peace and love as well.

The major weapon of Gandhian political action can be called *Satyagraha*. It was M. K. Gandhi who introduced the divine practice of soul purification as one of the methods in political action. This marks the synthesis of spiritualism with political affairs. For political freedom is merely a ways towards the attainment of divine freedom. For Gandhi patriotism is a stage to the land of eternal freedom and peace. He thinks that the rulers must be good and cannot alter their route themselves, and we the people who make the rulers and so both the rulers and makers of the rulers should avoid violence on the other hand. In this sense, every member of the state or society must invites *ahimsa* for his neighbours. Thus, Gandhi was interested in ruling out of *himsa*, i.e. injustice etc. from the state via the law of love and truth, i.e. *ahimsa* and *Satyagraha*. According to Gandhi, remaking of state and man as a constituent part of

the state is possible via self-purification. *Satyagraha* for Gandhi is not confined to what we speak, read or write. It is the force, the unit of awareness, a conscious force, different in character and in function from other forces, viz. violence in any shape or anti-social activities or any unfair means of the state. In brief, unlike other forces, it is self-awareness. It attempts to open up the true nature of the soul force. It is the force or fights for truth.

Gandhi's technique of *ahimsa* is known as *Satyagraha*, which literally means clinging of "Truth". According to Gandhi, *Truth is soul*. It is known as *Truth force* or *soul force* and **Tolstoy** called it *Soul-Force* or *Love-Force*. Carried out its utmost limit, this force is independent of pecuniary or other material assistance, even in its elementary form of physical force or violence. It is universal in that its universal applicability is a demonstration of its permanence and invincibility. It can be used alike by men, women and children. It is totally untrue to say that it is a force to be used only by the weak, so long as they are not capable of meeting violence by violence. This superstition arises from the incompleteness of the English expression (passive Resistance). It is impossible for those who consider themselves to be weak to apply this force. Only those who realise that there is something in man which is superior to be the brute nature in him, and that the latter always yields to it, can effectively be passive resisters. This force is to violence and, therefore, to all tyranny, all injustice what light is to darkness. Now it becomes clear that *Satyagraha* is bound to be non-violent, otherwise it turns into *duragraha*. Undoubtedly speaking, Gandhi's *Satyagraha* is different from passive resistance. It is not a passive state. Rather it is active than violence or tyranny and so on because in it violence is

completely unlawful. Thus, Gandhi's Satyagraha completely deviates from violence since there is invariably a high opinion for the law of **Truth** and **God** too. *Satyagraha*, therefore, is active resistance acting on the path of truth. As a divine way of truth there is place for *love* in passive resistance, hatred, coercion etc. in *Satyagraha*.

Satyagraha can be used successfully even by one individual in every aspect of his or her life. Thus, the most important feature of *Satyagraha* is that it is a best means of war of righteousness. It is the pursuit of truth with the strength of mind to achieve it. *Satyagraha* is a spiritual power lying inherent in all human being. In the same vein of *Swaraj*, Gandhi claimed that it is our birth right. So, *Satyagraha* is an inborn quality possesses by every human being according to Gandhi. That means every human being innately possessed *Satyagraha* for which acquisition of right and freedom is made possible. That is why it can be said that it (*Satyagraha*) is hidden in every one of ours; we have to make it energetic. It is common course. In essence it is the preamble of truth in political fields.

In the light of the above the discussion of *Satyagraha* is important and useful one at present day state. But the question arises: what is the actual purpose of Satyagraha? The possible answer of this question, we think, actually links with another question: Is our state at present free from evil activities? Is 21st century India free from corruption? We think Gandhi's concept of *Satyagraha* will survive well into the 21st century world as well as next generation of us. Since Gandhi conceives *Satyagraha* not only as a force against British; but it is a force in opposition to wickedness. At this juncture *Satyagraha* has been described as technique of *renovation* rather than a technique of coercion. It is conversion or renovation in the sense that it tend to bring a change of heart. In fact the *Satyagrahi* appeals to the mind and heart of men with the aim of bringing about a change. Gandhi envisages the view that in the dictionary of non-violent person, there is no place of external enemy but even for supposed enemy he will have nothing but compassion in his heart. He will believe that no man is intentionally wicked, that there is no man but is gifted with the faculty to discriminate between right and wrong, and that if the faculty were to be fully developed, it would surely mature into non-violence. Therefore, he will pray to God that he may give the supposed enemy a sense of right and bless him. His prayer for himself will always be that the spring of compassion in him may ever be flowing and that he may ever grow in moral strength. Thus, the fundamental nature of Gandhi's Satyagraha is to liquidate antagonism, but not the antagonist. Since his *Satyagraha* deals with love and forgiveness too. Moreover, Gandhi also laid down rules for *Satyagrahis*. These rules are qualities of *Satyagrahis*. According to him a *Satyagrahi* must possess: sincere and honest, open-minded, disciplined fighter, completely fearless, sacrifice,

practice of truthfulness and ahimsa in his entire acts, firm behaviour, practice fasting, consistency between thought and deed, broad-mindedness and tolerance in him, power of self-control, required the virtues, i.e. non-stealing, contentment and celibacy and so on, and a living faith on God etc. Apart from these, there are a number of features of *Satyagraha*. These are some of the important features of a *true Satyagrahi*. There is no question of doubt that a true *Satyagrahi* can serve wonder if and only if he has been able to fulfil these requirements. It is worthy to note here that **humanity** is the hallmark or desirable quality of a *Satyagrahi*. The *ideal of Satyagraha* is essential for us to defend humanity or save from harm. Gandhi contends that if a *Satyagrahi* becomes overconfident and fells that what he is doing great then his *Satyagraha* would be worthless. In this sense politics (both East and West) at present completely worthless because they are feeling proud of their acts. Again, we are not ignoring about corruption and other anti-social activities of our political leaders. The political nuisances and other immoral acts done by the political leaders, officials in particular and common public in general can be removed via the path of *Satyagraha*. Here we can name **Anna Hazare** for example. Unlike coward, he prescribes anti-corruption bill. This is the reason why Gandhi's principle of *Satyagraha* is a worthy object for political action. The actual purpose of *Satyagraha* is that **politics must be based on Truth and non-violence**.

For Gandhi, *Satyagraha* is a simple method or technique which can be used in a several manner according to situations. Thus, it has various forms such as, *Negotiation, Arbitration, Agitation and Demonstration, Economic Boycott, Non-cooperation, Civil Disobedience, Direct action, Fasting, strike, Dharna, Picketing, Non-payment of Taxes etc.*, depend on actual practice of it. However, all these are not favoured by Gandhi himself in his life. Even some of these are denounced by Gandhi. Gandhi was conscious about the mistreatment of *Satyagraha* via perversions or abuse. He has stressed on pure intention of Satyagraha. Unless the method of *Satyagraha* is pure, then it turns into *Duragraha* and so becomes a crime. In short, he seems catastrophe for India from violent behaviour, hostility etc. Indeed, the campaign of Satyagraha makes possible moral reforms of a state. Gandhi completely repudiates dishonest acts. He intends a good nature in every man for any sake. Accordingly, Gandhi envisages good conduct in every citizens of the state or society.

Thus, the concept of *Satyagraha* will be genuine only when it relies upon the common good. The very idea of common good or universal good can be achieved merely by *Satyagraha* and *non-violence*. *Satyagraha* and *ahimsa* are like the two sides of the same coin and so they are inter-twined. It is impossible to separate them. If a state build upon the firm foundations of *ahimsa* and *Satyagraha*

would not only be united but would be persistently sustained by the spirit of service and sacrifice that animates its peoples. *Satyagraha*, therefore, is a marvel power to build a state in anew. Each individual must have cardinal faith in *ahimsa* as human virtue and must pursue as the means of achieving truth according to *Satyagraha*. In a sense, as an ethical weapon *Satyagraha* raises political welfare to a higher plane. Because it is a means of winning freedom, harmony and welfare or getting better a vicious social and economic order too. No doubt, the modern idea of **true democracy** is possible only via the *Satyagraha*, otherwise not. The contemporary world committed by a number of **inhuman** activities and thereby violates human rights day by day. Nobody is saving in the contemporary world as there are rape, kidnapping, inequalities in job, education and several forms of violence as well as violence killed etc. In short, there are no values for human life as different types of threat comes to human life. At this juncture *Satyagraha* is essential to demolish inhuman acts. Perhaps, for this purpose the international community, acting through the UN has decided to observe **2nd October** of each year as **world's non-violence day** that reflects the highest respect for the apostle of peace and non-violence. This is the reason why *ahimsa* and *Satyagraha* is a weapon for secure life. It is global need to accept Gandhi's *ahimsa* and *Satyagraha* as the human way of life in the world. *Satyagraha* has been a great ideology for present age as it can guide us to solve the political as well as social problems of our society. *Satyagraha* is a true spirit of democracy. We "ought" to follow the path of *Satyagraha*. Equally we should call our neighbours to do like a *Satyagrahi*.

Gandhi's *Satyagraha* itself is a theory and principle of life because it is an ideal theoretical principle that can apply in our practical life. The key concept of Gandhi's *Satyagraha* is non-violence. Because what the doctrine of *Satyagraha* teaches man is either not to inflict pain or suffering on the opponent, but to suffer himself in order to proceed towards Truth. That means a true *Satyagrahi* dedicates his life for the realisation of Truth or God, not otherwise. *Satyagraha* presupposes the cultivation of all types of moral qualities in the individual offering it. In other words, moral virtues are needed for the purification of soul of a *Satyagrahi*. A true *Satyagrahi* must have a living faith in divinity. Apart from this, he should believe in truth and *ahimsa* as his *statement of belief*. Thus, the central principles of conduct of every true *Satyagrahi* are faith and courage. He must have faith in honesty, integrity and justice of his cause and courage of conviction so that he would not shrink from his course even in the face of keen hardship. Thus, in a nutshell, it can be said that *Satyagraha* cannot be distinguished from *ahimsa*. Thus, both *Satyagraha* and *Ahimsa* are theoretical as well as practical principle of human life. Gandhi practises both these principle in his practical life. We should follow these as the principle of our life.

One can ask: if *Satyagraha* is "Truth-Force or Soul-Force", then what is truth? In what sense *Satyagraha* called Soul-Force? Gandhi envisages that Truth is God, and *Satyagraha* is 'agraha' of 'Satya'. In this sense *Satyagraha* is holding on to truth. It is truth force in a deep sense. Gandhi called it love force or soul force. According to Gandhi, This law of love is nothing but a law of truth. Without truth there is no love; without truth it may be affection, as for one's country to the injury of others; or infatuation, as of a young man for a girl; or love may be unreasoning and blind, as of ignorant parents for their children. Love transcends all animality and is never partial. *Satyagraha* has, therefore, been described as a coin, on whose face you read love and on the reverse, you read truth. It is a coin current everywhere and has indefinable value. Thus, *Satyagraha* stresses a profound honesty and a hearty love for truth. *Satyagraha* serves on the conviction that truth represents the will and the means of God. Accordingly, the ways of Truth is the ways of God and hence the pathway of truth has to be followed in a vigorous manner as there is no alternative to God's way. Thus, the theory of *Satyagraha* is a rigorous discipline in the sense that the way of Truth is the only way of God. Gandhi advocates that there is only one God behind in every one of us which is the basis of love. Where there is love there is God because there is harmony and peace. That is to say, painstaking love is basic element of Gandhi's *Satyagraha*. Unless one has this fundamental love for mankind he never succeeds in practise the technique of *Satyagraha*. Here it is striking to note that *Satyagraha* appears to Gandhi almost as a religious pursuit because it demands unselfish and heartfelt quest of Truth. Gandhi's *Satyagraha* is universal which is derived from the fact that it is the way of God.

Of course, it called Soul-Force because a definite recognition of the soul within is a necessary. A *Satyagrahi* gives up the body in the certain faith that if anything would change his opponent's view, a willing sacrifice of his body must do so. And with the knowledge that the soul survives the body, he is not impatient to see the triumph of truth in the present body. Indeed, victory lies in the ability to die in the attempt to make the opponent see the truth, which the *Satyagrahi* for the time being expresses.

However, *Satyagraha* itself is not a new concept. Gandhi discovered it to give a new style to human life and to exercise it as a means for the utilization of spirit power within rational being. For him, unless moral development, no man can triumph against evil forces. For a moral hero development of morality is must as the soul force is successful in its work when the human conscience becomes able to distinguishing correct/right/good from the incorrect/wrong/bad in order to throw out the later. That is why *Satyagraha* is a political weapon based on *truth* and *ahimsa*. *Satyagraha* is gentle. It never

wounds. It must not be the result of anger or malice. It is never fussy, never impatient, and never vociferous. It is the direct opposite of compulsion. It was conceived as a complete substitute for violence.

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