

# TRUTH AND NON-VIOLENCE: A GANDHIAN CONCEPT

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**Abstract:** *Gandhi was a great supporter of Truth and Non-Violence. He had a great importance to the concept of Truth and Non-Violence. Truth or Satya, Ahimsa or Non-Violence are foundation of Gandhi's philosophy. The word 'Non-Violence' is a translation of the Sanskrit term 'Ahimsa'. He stated that in its positive form, 'Ahimsa' means 'The largest love, the greatest charity'. Moreover he stated that Ahimsa binds us to one another and also to God. So it is a unifying agent. Gandhi wrote, 'Ahimsa and Love are one and the same thing'. According to Gandhi the word 'Satya' comes from the word 'Sat' which means 'to exist'. So by the term 'Satya' Gandhi also means that which is not only existent but also true. Gandhi said that Truth and Non-Violence are the two sides of a same coin, or rather a smooth unstamped metallic disc. Who can say, which is the obverse and which is the reverse? Ahimsa is the means; Truth is the end. I will discuss the Gandhian concept of Truth and Non-Violence elaborately in this paper.*

**Keywords:** *Truth or Satyagraha, Non-Violence or Ahimsa, Characteristics of Non-Violence, Characteristics of Satyagrahi, Identification of Truth and God.*

## Introduction :

Mahatma Gandhi was the Pioneer of Non-Violence and a great supporter of Truth. He was born on 2nd October 1869. His prominent role in India's freedom struggle fetched him the Title of 'Bapu' (Father of Nation). The birthday of this Indian preeminent spiritual and political leader is celebrated as "International Day of Non-Violence" throughout the world. He had a great importance to the concept of Truth and Non-Violence. Truth or *Satya*, Ahimsa or Non-Violence are foundation of Gandhi's philosophy. The word 'Non-violence' is a translation of the Sanskrit term '*Ahimsa*'. He stated that in its positive form, '*Ahimsa*' means 'The largest love, the greatest charity'. According to Gandhi the word '*Satya*' comes from the word '*Sat*' which means 'to exist'. So by the term '*Satya*' Gandhi also means that which is not only existent but also true. An account of Gandhi's theory of Truth necessarily takes us to the consideration of his views on the nature of Non-Violence. Gandhi himself says, "I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and Non-Violence are as old as the hills. All I have done is to try experiments in both on as vast a scale as I could. In doing so I have sometimes erred and learnt by my errors. Life and its problems have thus become to me so many experiments in the practice of truth and Non-Violence....In fact it was in the course of my pursuit of truth that I discovered non-violence." Explaining more clearly the transition from the notion of truth to that of Non-Violence he says, "*Ahimsa* and *Satya* are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them. They are like the two sides of a coin, or rather a smooth unstamped metallic disc. Who can say, which is the obverse and which the reverse? *Ahimsa* is the means; Truth is the end. Means to be means must always be within our reach, and so *ahimsa* is our supreme duty. If we take care of the means, we are bound to reach the end sooner or later."

Gandhi identifies Truth with God. According to many philosophers God is the highest reality. At the same time Gandhi says that there is nothing besides Truth. So both Truth and God stands for the highest reality or the ultimate reality. And hence the two can be identified. He said that there is no person in earth who can deny Truth. God can be denied because the atheist does not believe in God. But the atheist cannot deny the power of Truth. Hence God is identified with truth.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER :

This paper tries to focus the relation between Truth and Non-Violence and try to show how Gandhi influenced by *satyagraha*.

According to Gandhi, *ahimsa* is the greatest force available to humankind. Though the concept of non-violence was not originated by Gandhi, he was the first person to apply it for a political purpose. Gandhi's greatest contribution, therefore, is the use of non-violence into a successful technique for direct mass action. The concept of non-violence was not a new one. Before the teachings of Gandhi, the notion of *ahimsa* finds an important place in Holy Scriptures, teachings of Gautama Buddha to Prophet Mohammad and works of various philosophers. However, it was Gandhi who converted it into a social and political technique and super humanitarian method of resolution to all type of crisis and problems.

## Meaning of Satyagraha:

*Satyagraha* is one of the greatest contributions of Gandhi to Indian history, in particular and world history, in general. The principle of *Satyagraha* was a most powerful and fruitful weapon used by Gandhi and his followers against the British rule in India. The term '*Satyagraha*' is a combination of two Sanskrit words, '*Satya*' meaning 'Truth' and '*Agraha*' meaning 'determined pursuit' or 'holding on to truth'. The word therefore, literally means, 'insistence on truth'. It is based on the principle of love and believes in '*love for all*' and '*suffer for all*'. It excludes the use of any form of violence since it is based on the philosophy that man does not know the absolute truth and therefore, cannot punish anyone. Earlier Gandhi used the term passive resistance for *Satyagraha* but latter he grew dissatisfied with the expression. *Satyagraha* differs from passive resistance in many ways. *Satyagraha* is based on truth and determination and rules out any form of violence or injury. Gandhi based *Satyagraha* on the Vedantic ideal of self-realisation. He was interested in discovering truth. He says that, "Truth is God". *Satyagraha* is a name invented by Gandhi, which means adherence to truth. It means Universal force.

### Principles of Satyagraha :

Satyagraha should follow the following principles: Non-Violence, Truth, Non-Stealing, Chastity, Non-possession, Body labour, Fearlessness, Equal respect for all religion, Freedom from untouchability, Every Satyagrahi in India should follow seven rules, Must have a living faith in God, Must believe in truth and non-violence, Must be leading a chaste life etc.

### Features of Satyagrahi :

A satyagrahi must be sincere and honest. He must be open-minded, must be a disciplined teacher, he must learn to put on restraints upon his own self. He leads to sacrifice firm behavior is essential for a satyagrahi. Simplicity and humility are regarded as the key factor of a satyagrahi. A satyagrahi practice truth in his actions, in thought and also in speech. Truth and non-violence with love is essential for satyagrahi. Gandhi says that "the world rests on the bedrock of Satya." Satyagraha is not a weapon of the coward and the helpless. Gandhi's Satyagraha rejects violence. It is a war without violence. It means the resistance of evil by its opposite, i.e. by good it includes moral and religious discipline. It refers the active force and not the inactive force. Gandhi's Satyagraha never rejects fighting.

*Satyagraha* as a movement was intended to replace methods of violence and was based entirely upon truth *Satyagraha* for Gandhi is the adherence to Truth and Truth for Gandhi means God. For him, Truth alone is eternal, everything else is momentary. He believed that everyone should search for Truth according to his lights and in this search for Truth he should always open himself to correction. He considered that one should seek to find truth though to find absolute truth is not possible for man. *Ahimsa* forms this means to seek truth and for him, both the means and the end are united to one another in a way as seed and tree are integrally related. In his concept of *Satyagraha* non-violence is very important. He considers that 'while truth is the goal, *ahimsa* or non-violence becomes the necessary and only means of realizing it'.

### Non-Violence:

*Satyagraha*, according to Gandhi, excludes all forms of violence since use of coercion, on one hand suppresses the development of the individuals and fails to show respect to adversary and on the other hand, obscures the vision of truth. His concept of *Satyagraha* is based on the notion that the adversary is also a human being having faculty of reasoning and goodness. Gandhi strongly opposed violence or suppression since it went against the integrity of an individual. Every individual has an equal right to be respected by others as Kant also holds, and bears a moral duty to show the same respect to other people's integrity and freedom. Gandhi said that violence can never be justified no matter for what noble cause it is used. This is because for Gandhi means and ends are inseparable. To achieve justice, one cannot force his views on others and curb their freedom. The use of violence for Gandhi not only degrades the opponent but also makes its user a lesser human being. He considered that a violent person is always at war 'with the world and believes that the world is at war with him and he has to live in perpetual fear.' Therefore, the consequence of violence is always utter helplessness, isolation and it functions to create a gulf between the aggressor and the society. Gandhi's concept of non-violence is not restricted merely to disavowing violence; not hurting people in mind and body but it goes beyond and encompasses certain essential values of love, forgiveness and compassion. *Ahimsa* not only connotes the act of refraining from doing harm to others but it is based on positive values.

For Gandhi to practice *ahimsa* or non-violence one needs a proper training of strong will, patience and moral courage and all these in turn lead to transformation of mind. For this transformation an inner conscience is needed which gives an excess to truth. Each one of us have a relative truth and non-violence acts as a tool that arbitrates between these truth claims. To live a life of non-violence Gandhi asserted, one needs a training to fully arouse his inner conscience and devotion and finally one achieves knowledge of truth about the moral and physical world.

Gandhi's strategy of non-violent action in India was not only for making constitutional demands rather it went ahead and aimed at something greater. This is so because he knew that mere constitutional changes have not shown fruitful results in first half century, and therefore, he introduces civil-disobedience movement which was an extra-constitutional strategy. The first part of the strategy was to achieve a 'mass support' or in other words, to make it a 'mass movement'. This movement intended to involve everyone whether from a higher class, lower one or peasant group. The aim was not only to make the foreign rulers leave the land but to completely erase out the influence of the rulers from the mind-set of people after the Britishers left India. Gandhi, being a vibrant visionary, could easily see the consequence of colonization on the mind of the colonized people. He knew that people would remain mentally enslaved even though they became politically free. To maintain the integrity of the people of his nation he coupled non-violence with the search for truth. However, when we thoroughly observe the current socio-political situations of Indians we still find that they are in the domain of complete enslavement and politically unfree. Gandhi's dream of freedom and non-violence still remains unfulfilled in the twenty first century.

Gandhi believed that *ahimsa* has evolved with the evolution of human civilization. The early man lived in caves and were basically cannibals having no definite place to live. With time an agricultural society was established and man started to settle down. An evolution took place and man became from a member of a family to member of community, following laws and rules to live together in a social environment. With slow process of civilization accompanied the transformation of *himsa* to *ahimsa* or violence to non-violence. For Gandhi, this slow evolution of *ahimsa* with civilization of man is a fact, which he expresses, "Had it been otherwise, the human species should have been extinct by now, even as many of the lower species have disappeared."

Gandhi believed that without the practice of Non-Violence Truth cannot be realized. Gandhi employed a curious argument to establish this point. Gandhi stated that God and Truth are identical. At the same time Gandhi accepted a pantheistic conception of God. He argued that God pervades all being. All beings are united by God and the act of unification is made possible through love or Non-Violence. So Non-Violence is ultimately the cementing bond of the universe that has its origin in God or Truth.

### Conclusion :

In conclusion we can say that both Truth and Non-Violence are closely interrelated. They are the same sides of a same coin. A critical account of the Gandhian concept of Non-Violence shows that Gandhi was not aware of the deep rooted aggressive instinct in man. Contemporary psychologist have pointed out that this instinct plays a major role in the human mental life. Gandhi did not play sufficient attention to it. His account of Non-Violence seems to be more dependent on his reading of religious texts than on psycho-social considerations. This is a major

critical point that may be raised against the Gandhian conception of Non-Violence. If Non-Violence is the expression of the life-instinct within man then violence is the expression of the death-instinct.

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