

Social reconstruction and gandhian philosophy

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Abstract

The focal point of this paper titled as Social Reconstruction and Gandhian Philosophy is the magnetic work practically exhibited by the great catalytic leader of the 20th Century, Mahatama Gandhi while reshaping and rebuilding the Indian society. Emergence of Mahatama Gandhi during the Indian National Freedom Movement was a revolutionary moment for the entire freedom struggle. Gandhi has come to this conclusion due to his vast experience in South Africa that until and unless the Indian society will be unified and aware, it would be difficult to attain the complete freedom, that's why Gandhi re-constructed the Indian society.

Keywords: social duty, catalytic, unified, multidiversity, ethnic awareness

Introduction

Since the inclusion of Gandhian element in Indian Political and Social scene, it has become evident that the social structure of Indian society will take a new shape. One significant line in the Bible propounds that human history is crowded with the names of hundreds of monarchs, rulers, army generals, historians and biographers, but only with few "Saints" and "Sadhus". Mohandas Karam Chand Gandhi, the worthy son of mother India, apart from being and having all other traits of human element was a "Saint" and an angel born on earth to promote justice, truth and non-violence.

Above anything else, Gandhiji's greatest contribution to politics in particular and in life in general was his teaching and practice of non-violence. As long as 1920, he wrote "Nonviolence is the law of our species as violence is the law of brute. The spirit lies dormant in the brute and he knows no law but that of physical force. The dignity of men requires the obedience to a higher Law the struggle of the spirit. Nonviolence is a perfect state. It is the goal towards which all mankind moves naturally, though unconsciously" (Yong India, August 1920). He again wrote "For me nonviolence is not a mere philosophical principle. It is rule and breath of life It is a matter not of intellect but of heart". Gandhiji was, by no means, the originator of principle of non-violence and similar principles. But he was first to apply them on a huge mass scale and in the political field. Writing on Indian Freedom - "My interest in Indian freedom will cease if she adopts violent means, for their fruit will be not freedom but slavery in disguise".

As taught and practised by Gandhiji, non-violence does not mean passivity or pacifism or sitting with folded hands in the face of danger. It does not mean seek submission to the will of evil—doer. "It is soul-force, truth force, truth-seeking force. It in short means Satyagraha which means resistance to evil with all the moral and spiritual force that a person can command: It is the use of moral force or firmness in vindication of truth. It is soul-force or power of God-head within us. It is in

accordance of ancient law of self-sacrifice. It means conscious suffering. In his own words - It does not mean meek submission to the will of evil-doer - "It is no negative force. It is force which is more positive than electricity and more powerful than even ether". The highest violence can be met by highest non-violence. Gandhiji called himself - the keeper of light-house called Satyagrah. "It is a principle for which I live, for which I desire to live, and for which I believe I am equally prepared to die".

Others interpreting Gandhiji's type of non-violence have called it a bravery of soul, a warfare of ascetic" and an "adventurer in love".

Non-violence as taught and practised by Gandhiji is rooted in Indian doctrine of ahimsa or "Non-injury". Negatively, it means refraining from causing pain or the taking of any life. Ahimsa means "avoiding injury to anything on earth in thought, word and deed". It means avoidance of harsh words, harsh judgements, ill-will, anger, spite and cruelty". It means in particular that one should not harbour an uncharitable thought even for one's enemy.

On the positive side, Ahimsa is copernicous with Christian principle of love. It is omnipotent, infinite, synonymous with God himself.

It is an all-pervasive eternal principle applicable to every life situation. Dr. G.N. Dhawan writes - "Ahimsa means an effort to abandon the violence that it is inevitable in life, Ahimsa stands for ultimate deliverance of men from bondage of flesh so that he may attain the state in which life is possible without the necessity of a perishable body whose sustenance inevitably involves destruction." It is the samman benam of life.

Satyagraha is the weapon of those who are physically weak and normally strong. It can also be the weapon of those who are both physically and morally strong. Pyarelal writes the starting point of Gandhiji's technique was that Non-violence is the weapon of physically weak. When brought under a strong influence of non-violence can be used by women, by children and by illiterate men and others whom we generally

regard as weak. Non-violence involves opposition to evil but by good means. It is overcoming of evil by good. In Gandhiji's own words: "The injunction 'love your enemies' is not only noblest idealism, it is also most practical politics."

Truth is the basic factor of non-violence. According to Gandhiji, "it is not enough to say, God is truth, but truth is God". In his own words, truth is the sovereign principle, which includes numerous other principles. The truth is not only truthfulness in word, but truthfulness in thought also, and not only the relative truth of our conception but the Absolute truth, the eternal principle, that is God "Truth quenches untruth." Love quenches anger, self-suffering quenches violence. This eternal rule is a rule not for saints only but for all. In this struggle, both parties are seeker after truth and, therefore, there is no question of one side being the victors and other side being the vanquished. There is nothing like a "fight to finish." In waging a non-violent struggle one should take care to see that the cause for which one is fighting is absolutely true so far as God enables one to see the truth. If at any point in the course of that struggle, a person has a fear that he has departed from truth, he should have no hesitation in confessing his guilt and renouncing whatever gains he may have made even as Gandhi did when he called off one of his non-violent movement when he was within an ace of success saying that he has committed a Himalayan blunder. Truth to the Satyagrahi is more precious than victory. The principle of truth means that non-violence can not be undertaken in the light-hearted spirit. It means that one should live quite close to God and take his marching orders from him.

The Satyagrahi's chief force is that there is something of God in everyman and that appeal can be made to the divine in man through love and conscious self-suffering. He can rouse the moral giant which lies in the nature of his opponent. Suffering strengthens those who suffer and weakens those who inflict suffering. If truth is basic principle, love is the means by which it is realised. Non-violence can melt even the stoniest hearts. Gandhiji believed in winning over people through persuasion rather than through compulsion. It was equally his conviction that one could hate evil without hating evil-doer. This he showed clearly, on more than one occasion, in his relation to British Government. He trained himself and others to realise that it was possible to hate British system of Government and call it even "Satanic" without entertaining any hatred for Britain. This is in accordance with Christ's injunction to love one's enemies. In his own words "If my love is sincere, I must love the Englishmen in spite of my distrust". At another time, he said, "I am fighting British imperialism, but I am not fighting the Britisher, I am not fighting Englishmen or anybody".

To give some practical example of this type of love, Gandhiji had nothing but unqualified praise for English Judge who performs his "Dharma" in convicting him for a six year imprisonment in 1922. His immediate response to war issue in 1937 was most moving when he contemplated the possibility of the aerial destruction of London by Nazi bombing.

Writing on the importance of love in the practice of non-violence, Gandhiji writes "Love never claims. It ever gives, love ever suffers, never resents, never revenges itself". Ahimsa in its positive form, means the largest love, the greatest charity. He further says that in the practice of non-

violence truth is foundation and love the weapon. Writing on self-suffering, Gandhiji says: "A nation which is capable of limitless sacrifice is capable of rising to limitless heights Greater is the sacrifice, the quicker is progress. Gandhiji taught and practised self-suffering, sacrifice and self-immolation.

Other Requisites of Non-Violence

1. Inner purity

In Gandhiji's view, a Satyagrahi should not only practise love, but also observe inner purity. If non-violence is to be warfare of ascetic, he should prepare itself by self-discipline civility and inner purity. Incivility spoils Satyagraha like a drop of arsenic in milk. Elsewhere he writes that, Satyagrahi should adopt chastity, adopt poverty, follow truth, and cultivate fearlessness. Stressing inner purity, Gandhiji called Satyagrah a movement of national perfection. In his own life he practised Brahmacharya in response to a great call although he did not make it universal rule of everybody. Speaking on the importance of purity, he says, "inner purity and unselfishness is the rock on which the Satyagraha must stand in order to touch the heart of opponent and kindle in it the dormant spark of goodness in it. Chastity is one of the greatest discipline and without which the mind cannot attend requisite firmness. Non-violence begins and ends by turning the searchlight inwards.

2. Fasting

Gandhiji regarded fasting as an important element in practice of non-violence. It is in accordance of Indian tradition and practice. It is an agent of self-purification and in a national struggle an instrument of national penitence. A genuine fast cleans the body, mind and soul. It crucifies the flesh and to that extent sets the soul free. Fasting is prayer. In Gandhiji's life, fasting and prayer went together. He says-all fasting, if it is a spiritual act, is an intense prayer or a preparation for it. Fasting is the deepest prayer coming from lacerated heart. Mortification of the flesh is a condition of spiritual progress. A complete fast is a complete and literal denial of self.

Against the charge that fasting is a form of moral coercion, Gandhiji vigorously defended himself saying that it was in accordance with inner voice and that it was "against no body in particular". It is particularly against myself. The call to fast came to him as voice of God after great deal of mental and spiritual struggle. It was "as unmistakable as some human voice definitely speaking to me and irresistible". It was no self-delusion or hallucination. "For me the voice was more real than my own existence." "For me the voice was more real than my own existence." The only tyrant I accept in this world is the still small voice within me. I may be despicable person but when truth speaks through me I am invincible.

Whenever Gandhiji fasted, he wanted that people should take him at his word and do what he wanted them to do only if they saw the justice of it. It was his contention that all of his fasts were meant to influence the people morally and not to coerce them either directly or indirectly. They were meant to quicken the consciences of people. There was no desire on the part of Gandhiji to commit suicide through fasting. Fasting to Gandhiji was not a political game, but an intense form of moral and spiritual discipline and suffering.

Gandhiji advocated both private and public fasting but neither

kind had its value if it is undertaken for selfish ends. At times, he used fasting against the impurities of his followers. As important as outer fasting he claimed inner fasting though such means as working for truth, practising love, and abjuring earthly possession and ambition. In extreme cases, fasting unto death is an integral part of Satyagraha. Fasting, like other good acts, should be undertaken without an expectation of fruits. In short, it is wrong to fast for selfish ends.

3. Fearlessness

Fearlessness is the first requisite of spirituality. Cowards can never be moral. A Japanese writer described Gandhiji as a "militant person of" outstanding courage and fearlessness". For this reason, Gandhiji wanted people not only to be brave but fearless. Cowardice and fear are a sin against holy spirit. It was Gandhiji's own teaching that it is far better to use violence than to run away from evil. If a person does not have complete faith in non-violence and can not defend himself and others by love and conscious self-suffering, he should use violence.

4. Non-possession

The kind of fearlessness that Gandhiji calls for necessitates the cultivation of an attitude of non-attachment i.e. One should detach interest in the material things of life. In the Christian terminology, one should be in the world and not out of it. The reason why non-violence has not been as great success in the west as it has been in India is that it has been firmly rooted in non-attachment. For Gandhiji so many of so called comforts of life are not only indispensable but positive hindrance to elevation of mankind. Renunciation is the way of realisation. Non-possession is ideal and exclusive possession calls for use of violence. This being so, Gandhiji called for duty-centered economy rather than right-centered economy.

5. Perseverance

If non-violence is an eternal principle, one should not be in a hurry for results. One should cultivate a divine patience and perseverance. It must be borne in mind that at the same time that quick results brought about by warfare are never stable and lasting. A non-violent person knows no defeat because of his infinite faith in God. One has the satisfaction that even when one fails that one is building for eternity. A non-violent person is quick to realise that repeated attempts and repeated failures before good can be succeeded.

Gandhiji did not equate patience and perseverance with lethargy and fatalism. A good example of it is "do or die" policy of 1942.

It was Gandhiji's conviction that those who did not have faith in absolute non-violence might resort to such force as they had. Even in the conflicts between nations, Gandhiji did not always teach passive resistance. During 30's when Japan was taking aggressive policy and made unprovoked attacks upon China, Gandhiji thought it is relatively justified for China to take similar step. He held similar view when German attacked Poland, physical resistance to those cases are nearest approach to non-violence.

6. Non-violence: Religiously motivated:

Gandhiji was essentially a man of religion; it is his religious conviction that led to the practice of non-violence. To him,

morality was synonymous with religion. Rights, ceremonies, dogmas have little place in religion. Morality is the basis of things and truth is the substance of morality. The five cardinal vows of Gandhiji were truth, Ahimsa, non-possession, non-stealing, brahmacharya and chastity.

This doctrine of non-violence is a total philosophy of life It pervades the whole life of man and merely related to isolated acts. It applies both private and public sphere of life. In the economic field it means a centralised village economy opposed to both Capitalism and Communism, both of which are forms of exploitation. In the political field it means a federation of autonomous village republics. In the field of international relation, it means arbitration, negotiation, adjudication necessitating in extreme cases in the formation of International Peace Force. In its relation to other faiths, cultures, ideologies, Gandhiji's non-violence means the cultivation of spirit of true tolerance rooted in mutual sympathy, humility and understanding. It is capable of being applied to caste, class, racial conflicts too. Now, it can be applied to whole creation.

7. Non-violence; not coercion

In spite of repeated charge that Satyagraha was a form of coercion, Gandhiji held that it was not a coercion in any point of view- economic, psychological, political, moral. It is based upon idea of persuasion. It is calculated to appeal to the moral giant that lies dormant in the bosom of one's opponent. It is not moral coercion. It is appeal to man's reason and his sense of decency and not a threat to his person. It does not humiliate the opponent. It dazzles him and at last compels recognition from him. It shows a tremendous and almost child-like faith in the moral capacity of one's opponent.

Social Change via Non-violence -

Unlike Karl Marx, Gandhiji wanted to have social change through non-violent methods. Unlike Marx, he was not a believer of class struggle. His emphasis was on class-cooperation, all working together for common good. Gandhi was a philosophical idealist, whereas Marx was a dialectical materialist. Religion meant nothing to Marx but for Gandhiji it was warp and wolf of life.

For economic revolution, it gave the instrument of co-operation. He used to say, I am a born-co-operator. At the same time, he recognised the elements of value in conservatism, liberalism, socialism and communism as well as anarchism.

Gandhi's society was one Sarvodaya Society. By Sarvodaya he means Sarva + Udaya i.e. upliftment of all. Such a society will be stateless and classless. But it does not come about immediately and all at once. Society is to be transformed and it must pass through the immediate stage to the ultimate ideal. That is maintaining the existing institutions of state and purifying them through non-violence means till the people are ready and worthy to be free of them. For him, the first attempt is to have Gram Raj (Government by the village).

Then law suits and disputes will be judged and settled within the village. Then it will be Ram Raj (Kingdom of God) then there will no longer be any law suits or disputes and we shall live as one family.

This Gram Raj is analogous to Gandhiji's PanchayatiRaj or village Swaraj. Gram-Raj means small administrative units

with a population not exceeding three to Four thousand people and serving as ideal convenient units for representative democracy. In Gram Raj individual ownership gives way to community ownership. There is no individual possession of land, labour and wealth. "Each owns everything" "Each will offer his all to the community and the community will take care of him". Under such Gram Raj State does not disappear. But it transforms its nature and character of its government in conformity with non-violence social order. Such a nonviolent State possesses the following attributes which could in themselves be considered as important features of Gram-Raj.

Man in Sarvodaya Society

Men composing the Sarvodaya Society will be bound together by love, every individual is living for others and others living be very individual. To Gandhiji, such a Society is just like a family and the relation between individual and society is of close interdependence and co-operation. He rejects the theory of Laissez faire. He also rejects the other extreme view that individual is nothing without Society and whatever he is, it is because of Society. Gandhiji says, "I believe in individual freedom but you must not forget that man is essentially a social being, he has risen to present status by learning to adjust his individualism to the requirement of social progress. Unrestricted individualism is the law of jungle.

Thus, in his attempt of better ordering of human society, Gandhiji devised a new moral strategy; the method of regulating along non-violent lines, group life in its political, economic, national and international aspect.

Gandhiji's solution for present state of confusion is the necessity to moralise group and political life, "which under the complexity of modern condition encompasses the whole of our existence". There cannot be separate loads, one for individual, social and other for political. The same load of morality should be observed in all human sphere of activity.

In order to work out a synthesis between the individual and group, between social, economical, political life, Gandhiji begins with individual whose moral regeneration he declared as the first need. Gandhiji's 'Swaraj' was concerned with individual's inner freedom as well as his external freedom in society. His was, therefore, a simultaneous reform of individual and society. True morality and spirit of non-violence must manifest itself in every action of individual as individual and also as a member of society. The individual and society act and react upon each other.

For redressing political wrongs, he incorporated the method of Satyagraha. Satyagraha is based upon moral force as opposed to brute force. It is not passive but active non-violence resistance. It combines "Satya" with "Ahimsa". It is nothing but introduction of truth and gentleness in the political field.

The important techniques of Satyagraha are Non-cooperation, Hartal, Social Ostracism, Picketing, Civil-disobedience, Hijrat, Fasting and Strike.

Its relevance in modern times

In this present era of automation, in the face of plentitude and magnitude of social, economic, political changes, the relevance of Gandhiji's attitude to tackle the new problems of society is urged and asked. It has been pointed out that some of Gandhian ideas become obsolete and lose its relevance in

modern times. Some argue that his idea of Satyagraha and picketing is out of tune of spirit of parliamentary democracy. Again, it is charged that, his applicability of non-violent procedures for eradication of social, political, economic evils in present times fail to serve the purpose. But, thinking impartially, such an idea is erroneous and subject to criticism itself. In the force of new vital, inevitable circumstances, some changes ought have to be brought in the ideas of Gandhiji to tackle the new problems. But that does not mean that it has lost all of its vitality.

Let modern and new India adopt the Gandhian method of non-violence for her social, political and economic changes. If this will be done, it will be a rich tribute to that great man and undoubtedly there will be greater-brighter-better India in near future. Once this long cherished ideal of Gandhiji was achieved then that would be the golden days for India and its social fabric.

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