

GANDHIAN NON-VIOLENCE IN THE PRESENT CONTEXT

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Abstract

The word Ahimsa (Sanskrit:ahimsā, Pāli: avihiṃsā) means 'not to injure' and 'compassion'. The word is derived from the Sanskrit root hiṃs – to strike; hiṃsā is injury or harm; a-hiṃsā is the opposite of this, i.e. cause no injury, do no harm. Ahimsa is also referred to as nonviolence, and it applies to all living beings—including all animals—in ancient Indian religions.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi successfully promoted the principle of Ahimsa to all spheres of life, in particular to politics. His non-violent resistance movement was revolutionary; it was for the first time that ahimsa was used as a political weapon to influence the oppressors. It had an immense impact on India, impressed public opinion in Western countries, and influenced several 20th century leaders of various civil and political rights movements such as Nelson Mandela and the American civil rights movement's Martin Luther King, Jr. and James Bevel.

Keywords: *Gandhi, Truth, Love, Non-violence, Violence, Satyagraha*

Introduction

History of man-kind is so full of selfishness, greed, violence and cruelty that the possibility of improvement often seems doubtful. The power of entrenched interests is so immense and the energy of organized aggression is so tremendous that it is very difficult to see how gentle resistance plus love could either effectively sap such power or overcome or divert such energy. The destruction of both ponderables and imponderables by modern military weapons is so terrific that it is hard to believe that the power of slow-acting, slight or gentle forces can be superior. In nature, the most important forces are silent. Examples are gravitation, sunlight, electro-magnetic forces, bacteria, the growth processes of plants and animals, the effects of environment. A considerable portion of material forces, such as gravitation, magnetism, heat, electric waves and sub-molecular forces, are invisible even under the microscope.

Since times immemorial the Indian way of life has been driven by the fundamental concept of Ahimsa/Non-Violence. In this tradition non-violence is perceived as beneficial to the sum total of nature. In the philosophical tradition of India, right from Jainism and Buddhism till Gandhi, non-violence/Ahimsa has not been restricted to the realm of philosophical speculation but has been the

pivot of individual conduct. It is this non-violent culture that has nurtured co-existence between men and nature.

In India, the freedom struggle, spearheaded by Mahatma Gandhi, opposed colonialism and its human rights violation through the unique concept of Ahimsa or non-violence. This was implemented through Satyagraha --holding on to the truth by non-violent resistance to evil, by refusing to submit to the wrong.

Gandhi referred to Non-violence in a holistic and inclusive sense. His idea of non-violence embraced a non-violent economic process, non-violent state and its processes along with life as a whole. Ahimsa is dharma and Gandhi had explained religion also on the basis of truth and non-violence. He regarded Ahimsa or love as the rule of existence and tried to substantiate his argument through scientific explanations.

Violence is a comprehensive category and is manifested both at the personal and the institutional levels. Evil thoughts, sentiments of revenge and brutality, verbal pugnacity, and even accumulation of unnecessary things represent examples of personal violence. Falsehood trickery, intrigues, chicanery and deceitfulness are also forms of violence, according to the comprehensive connotation given to the term by Gandhi. Physical punishments, imprisonment, capital punishment and wars represent examples of violence committed by government. Economic exploitation and strangulations of others are also manifestations of violence. Even excess of emulation and competition can become species of violence. Non-violence or Ahimsa is, hence, necessarily, equally comprehensive and represents the total neutralization of violence in all forms.

There is a solid concern for the actual and the concrete in Gandhi's saying that the sword is not the sign of strength but the symbol of fear and weakness. Fear generates suspicion and sometimes even arrogance. The accumulation of fear results in the formation of complexes. Sometimes it may produce aggressiveness. Gandhi teaches the psychological efficacy of fearlessness based on spiritual faith as the way to counteract the blighting influences of political coercion, group jealousy and rivalries and individual appetites.

Gandhi was a perfect devotee of civility and humility, but he explicitly, unconditionally and categorically stated that if the only alternatives were cowardice and violence, he would choose the latter.

He was not tired of repeating that fear or cowardice should have no place in the national dictionary. He wrote “The truth is that cowardice itself is violence of a subtle and therefore, dangerous type, and far more difficult to eradicate than the habit of physical violence. A coward never risks his life. Who would kill often risks it. A non-violent person’s life is always at the disposal of him who would take it. For he knows that the soul within never dies. The encasing body is ever perishing. The more a man gives his life, the more he saves it. Thus, non-violence requires more than the courage of the soldier of war. The Gita definition of a soldier is one who does not know what it is to run away from danger.”

In present scenario, Satyagraha is more than a political tool of resistance. It is a holistic approach towards life, based on the ideals of truth and moral courage. The similarities of the Satyagraha to some of the greatest philosophical and religious tenets of the world have been observed and much written about. Gandhi’s system of Satyagraha was based on nonviolence, non-co-operation, truth and honesty. Gandhi used non-violence in India’s freedom struggle as main weapon and India became independent from British rule. In present times, there are some live examples which show the success of Non-violence resistance by using Gandhian strategy. Mahatma Gandhi was against any form of exploitation and injustice. According to him, evils must be opposed at any cost. But he insisted that the weapons must be non-violent and moral ones. The adoption of peaceful method made one superior and put the enemy at a disadvantage but the condition is the opponent must be dealt with mutual respect and love. Gandhi believed that only through love an enemy could be permanently won.

The power of nonviolence and love is so similar to and so harmonious with the other subtle creative forces of nature that in the human realm it may be considered one of the higher conserving and growth-producing forces of nature. As such, it is in the long run more powerful than violence.

Since trust is an essential prerequisite to persuasion, and truth creates trust, persistent devotion to truth at all costs is strongly persuasive.

Non-violent resistance with love is able to conquer cruelty, violence, aggression, and other abuses of power because: (1) the power of many repeated gentle stimuli to cause surpassing growth of the potential deficiencies in the opponent is sure; (2) the user of gentle stimuli has aiding him a wider and more enduring range of forces than does the user of violence; (3) the whole is greater than the sum of its parts and since love expresses the unity and wholeness of the human species, it is a power greater than those that express only individuals or other parts of humanity; (4) intelligent love acts in advance to reduce or prevent frustrations and thereby to reduce violence to a minimum; (5)

truth is an important element in nonviolence, and as truth promotes mutual trust, it is highly persuasive; and (6) these powers are effective between groups as well as between individuals.

Persuasive Techniques

We use persuasive language to convince others to agree with our facts, share our values, accept our argument and conclusions, and adopt our way of thinking. There are many different ways to persuade people. Here are some of the more common:

1. **Appeals** One persuasive technique is appealing to the audience's:

- Emotions
- Fears
- Desire to seem intelligent
- Need to protect their family
- Desire to fit in, to be accepted, to be loved
- Desire to be an individual
- Desire to follow a tradition
- Desire to be wealthy or save money
- Desire to be healthy
- Desire to look good
- Desire to protect animals and the environment
- Pride in our country

Often other persuasive techniques can also involve an appeal.

2. **Evidence:** Using evidence is very persuasive as it makes the reader see the author as knowledgeable and the argument as more logical or reliable. Statistics, expert opinions, research findings and anecdotal evidence.

3. **Attacks:** Attacks on opposing views, or the people who hold them can persuade the audience by portraying views and beliefs which are contrary to the author's contention as foolish, dangerous, uncaring or deceitful. Using humour to make fun of these views can be particularly persuasive.

4. **Inclusive and Exclusive Language** Inclusive language such as 'we', 'our', 'us' and exclusive language such as 'them' can persuade by including the reader, or by creating a sense of solidarity or a sense of responsibility.
5. **Rhetorical Questions:** Rhetorical questions are questions that do not require an answer and are asked for effect only. They engage the audience and encourage them to consider the issue and accept the author's answer, or imply that the answer is so obvious that anyone who disagrees is foolish.
6. **Cause and effect:** arguments may claim there is a cause and effect relationship when really there is just a relationship and other factors should be considered.
7. **Connotations:** The connotation is the emotional meaning associated with the word. Persuasive authors often choose their words carefully so that the connotation suits their purpose. 'Kill' and 'Slaughter' both mean the same thing, but the word 'slaughter' has a different connotation to 'kill', as it causes the audience to imagine that the act was particularly horrific.
8. **Analogy:** Analogy is a form of reasoning which compares one thing with another in order to make a particular point.
9. **Generalisations:** Make sweeping statements about a whole group, based on only one or two members of that group. These can be persuasive if the audience believes the generalization is appropriate, but can undermine argument if they do not.
10. **Humour:** Humor, such as puns, irony, sarcasm, satire and jokes can be persuasive by dismissing opposing views, providing a more engaging and friendly tone, and sway an audience by having them enter into the joke.
11. **Jargon:** By using specialised terms, the author can persuade the audience that they are an expert. When announcing a recession whilst trying to save face a politician may call it '*period of economic adjustment*' or '*interruption of economic expansion*'.
12. **Formal Language:** Formal language can make the author sound knowledgeable while removing emotion from the issue. This can make the argument sound reasonable and rational, and the contention seem balanced,
13. **Colloquial language:** Colloquial language is informal, every day, conversational language that includes down to earth views and is seductive because it appears friendly, and can make the audience feel that the author is on the same wavelength as them.

14. **Repetition:** By repeating letters, words and phrases the author can reinforce an argument and ensure that the point of view being made stays in an audience's mind.
15. **Hyperbole:** The use of hyperbole emphasizes points by exaggerating. It can be used to mock opposing opinions, as a shock tactics technique, or an appeal to fears.
16. **Alliteration and Assonance:** The repetition of initial consonant sounds (alliteration) or vowel sounds (assonance) adds emphasis to major points and makes them more memorable.
17. **Imagery and Figurative Language:** use of figurative language, metaphor and simile can paint a word picture for audience, making the point visually and by comparison, or appeal to emotions. They can also make the author appear sophisticated or well spoken.
18. **Images:** Images can also be used to persuade the reader, either independently or used with an article.

Conclusion

Non-violence, hence is to be regarded as, the summit of bravery Gandhi pointed out that he could no more preach non-violence to a cowardly man than he could tempt a blind man to enjoy healthy scenes.

At the end it can be concluded that Mahatma Gandhi is indisputably India's gift to the world; the pursuit of peace through the practice of truth (satyagraha), nonviolence (ahinsa), compassion and kindness is his gift to humanity. Though the centrality of education, like nonviolence, is almost conclusive, the type of education that is necessary for peace is what has never been addressed in any serious manner. There is a need for education not as the usual intellectual exercise of regurgitation but a journey through self – of building peace first with the self, before the society.

In Gandhi's thought, Ahimsa precludes not only the act of inflicting a physical injury, but also mental states like evil thoughts and hatred, unkind behaviour such as harsh words, dishonesty and lying, all of which he saw as manifestations of violence incompatible with Ahimsa. Gandhi believed Ahimsa to be a creative energy force, encompassing all interactions leading one's self to find Satya, "Divine Truth".

The Gandhian strategy is the combination of truth, sacrifice, non- violence, selfless service and cooperation. According to Gandhi one should be brave and not a coward. He should present his views, suggestions and thoughts without being violent. One should fight a war with the weapons of truth and

non-violence. Gandhi said that “There is no god higher than truth.” According to Gandhi’s thoughts, non- violence is ultimate solution of every kind of problem in the world.

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