

The Practical Importance of Gandhian Concept of Non-violence and Peace

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This paper is an attempt to highlight the concept of non-violence and peace from Gandhian perspective. Among these Truth and Non-violence or Ahimsā have occupied special places which still influence contemporary social and political thought. Gandhiji was a very practical man who applied himself to the solution of the problems that mankind in general and the people of India in particular faced with. He gave his followers the weapon of Ahimsā and the noble technique of Satyāgraha to restore justice in the society. He fought against injustice without any weapon but, was successful in the use of non-violence as a peaceful means. Lord Buddha used Ahimsā for the realization of social harmony and for the well-being of all whereas Gandhi realized Ahimsā to be one of the powerful weapons in the fight against one's opponents. He made relaxations in his concept of non-violence for making its use in once daily life.

Gandhi considered Non-violence besides truth, as synonyms with God. He believed that non-violence has its own relevance in resolving conflict and is also related to the reconstruction of the society. Non-violence resolution of conflict is in accordance with the dignity of man's spirit. He can save his spirit by observing non-violence, which is in tune with his spirituality. Non-violence binds together, promoting cooperation, harmony, unity and preventing destruction, contributes to development.

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Introduction

The word 'Violence' (Hirñsā) is derived from the root which means to kill, to harm, to injure, and to inflict pain and general unpleasantness on others. No doubt it is a mental act generated by antipathy or ill-will or hatred and finds manifestation through any one of three outlets viz., mental, physical or bodily and verbal or spoken. In generic sense, it appears that violence means causing harm to others and even to oneself in any form. Violence is practiced by one who has a dark and morally inferior character. On the other hand, Non-violence or Ahimsā has come to mean various things such as non-killing, non-injury, non-hatred, harmlessness, non-cruelty, non-aggression, tenderness, innocence and goodwill. A part from these it includes a feeling of loving kindness and compassion towards all. Non-violence or Ahimsā is doing well to all with all- body, mind, and speech. All most all the system of Indian Philosophy accepted it as one of the cardinal virtues. Gandhi proceeds towards the concept of non-violence within a value perspective and as a principal moral regulative force in human life from his philosophical positions.

Review of Related Literature

The Jainas, the most rigorous practitioners of 'Ahimsā' have classified 'himsā' or violence into two broad heads viz, *arambhaja* and *anarambhaja*, i.e. unavoidably and intentional violence. The *arambhaja himsa* includes unavoidable violence committed in the exercise of one's profession, violence committed in defense of person and property, and in the performance of domestic duties. In Buddhism, ahimsā is in essential to every monk. In Hindu epics, ahimsā could be practiced with success only by a saint who has renounced all worldly pursuit. The concept of ahimsā or non-violence is also found in Vedas, Upanishads. The popular preaching of Vedas goes--- '*Ma himssyat sarva bhutane*' (do not kill any living being). In the Vedic literature the term 'Ahimsā' is used as a noun, meaning non-injury. In Veda, Indra chant hymns in such a manner that it may not do any harm. The concept Ahimsā or non-violence was very much prevalent during the Upanisadic age too. In the Chandagya Upanishad meditation, charity, right dealing, non-injury to life and truthfulness are the right forms of conduct. Not only in the Vedas and the Upanishads but in Smritis, Rāmāyana, Mahābhārata, Vidura- Nīti, Bhagavadgītā and Purāṇas also references highlighting merits of non-violence or ahimsā are to be found.

Non-violence or Ahimsā is thus traditionally considered to be a virtue which covers ever spheres of life, i.e. physical, mental and emotional. Abstinence from killing and injury is the physical side or aspect. Mentally it gives a spirit to think well wishing even for evil-doers. Non-violence builds the foundation of ethics and morality.

Objectives

The requirement today, is to cultivate qualities like spirit of sacrifice, selfless service to society, cooperation, adherence to truth and non-violence in students. The objectives of this topic are-

- Learning and practice of non-violence.
- To find out the importance of non-violence or ahimsā for society.
- Working for the collective well-being of the society.

Research Methodology

Present paper is totally on the basis of “philosophical method” and the data collected from the all primary and secondary sources. The research of ahimsā or non-violence has a very wide range area. But in this study, the scope taken here is the need and practical importance of non-violence or ahimsā in the present society for specific and concise discussion on the matter. In this study, which is aimed to investigate the status of the implementation of ahimsā based education in our society and its awareness among the students, teachers and parents is descriptive in nature. The main purpose of this research is the description of the existing present theories and follows proper research method.

Discussion

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, popularly known as Bapuji, was not an academician, he was not an erudite scholar of any science, he was not a Philosopher on the accepted sense of the term, he was not an economist or a sociologist of the type we have in our universities, he was not a prophet and he was not a Sādhu. Gandhiji was a very practical man who applied himself to the solution of the problems that mankind in general and the people of India in particular faced with. Though the concept is not a new one and it has a long tradition from Vedic-Upanishadic period Gandhi's name is commonly identified with the concept of ahimsā or non-violence. It has been noted that Gandhi will be remembered as one of the very few who have set the stamp of an idea in an epoch and that idea is non-violence. Gandhi's view of politics and especially of social and individual ethics is firmly based upon human nature and human perfectibility. He gave his followers the weapon of ahimsā and the noble technique of Satyāgraha to restore justice in the society. Lord Buddha used non-violence or ahimsā for the realization of social harmony and for the well-being of all whereas Gandhi realized non-violence or ahimsā to be one of the powerful weapons in the fight against one's opponents. Not only from Buddhistic way of life but from Jainism too. Gandhi took the initiative in propagating his concept of non-violence or ahimsā. Gandhi didn't adopt the concept of ahimsā from Buddhism or Jainism. Gandhi made relaxations in his concept of ahimsā for making its use in once daily life.

Mahatma Gandhi looks into non-violence or ahimsā and experimented with it thought out of his life. He fought against injustice without any weapon but, was successful in the use of non-violence as a peaceful means. The English were very powerful since, they're equipped with the modern weapons of war, destruction and suppression. To wage a war against the English, Gandhi had no material weapons like the ones the British had. He had the only weapon of non-violence and peace. He was a dedicated man with the experience of the satyāgrahi (non-violent resistance) and was determined to use the non-violent way in the India freedom struggle.

Gandhi's ultimate goal of non-violence by adopting the means of Truth and non-violence, Gandhi's aim was to usher in an Eldorado of bliss for the common men, called Ram-Rajya by him. He could envisage that such an environment could generate a feeling of universal friendliness among all the beings. The core of Gandhi's teachings was meant not for his own country or for his own people alone but for all time to come. Gandhi considered self-realization to be the ultimate aim of men's life and service of the nearest and the best known God's creation to be the only for its achievement. Gandhi described the ideal society of his conception as the Ram-Rajya, or the kingdom of the God on earth. He believed that "human nature could never become so perfect that man would be able to do completely without the state". This was probably because, he thought, that the better the state, the lesser would be its interference with the voluntary efforts of the people.

Buddhism arose with its basic principles of well-beings of all. Buddha's first commandment of '*bahujan hitāya bahujan sukhāya*' always remains as an underlying current in all his teachings. Gandhi described the ideal society of his conception as the *Ram-Rajya*, or the kingdom of the God on earth. He conceived it as a self-regulated and well-ordered model, which would be absolutely free from all coercion, whether political, economic or moral. In his ideal society, complete non-violence, equality of sexes, reverence for all faiths, unity in diversity, voluntary bread labour and mutual aid and cooperation would reign supreme. When this type of social structure is achieved, there will be no violence around. Everybody will be happy and engaged in his own job. There will be peace and happiness all around. In this type of society, there will be no disturbance among the living beings and this is nothing but laying down the foundation of an '*Ahimsaka samāj*' free from all types of violence. According to Gandhi "I accept the interpretation of ahimsa viz. that it is not merely a negative state of harmlessness but it is a positive state of love, of doing good even to the evil doer. But it doesn't mean helping the evil doer to continue the wrong or tolerating it by passive acquiescence on the contrary love, the active state of ahimsā requires. You to reset the wrong doer by dissociating yourself from him even though it may offend him or injure him physically" Gandhi introduces ahimsā to counteract with violence not merely to resist but also to practice the positive approaches of life.

Gandhi considered non-violence or ahimsā besides truth, as synonyms with God. He believed that non-violence has its own relevance in resolving conflict and is also related to the reconstruction of the society. Non-violence resolution of conflict is in accordance with the dignity of man's spirit. He can save his spirit by observing non-violence, which is in tune with his spirituality. Non-violence binds together, promoting cooperation, harmony and unity and preventing destruction, contributes to development. He said that, "I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills...life and its problems have thus become to me so many experiments in the practice of truth and non-violence. Infect it was in the course of my pursuit of truth that I discover non-violence".

In transition from the notion of truth to that of non-violence, Gandhiji says, non-violence and truth are so intertwined and interdefinable terms that it is practically impossible to separate them. They are like the two sides of the same coin. Non-violence or ahimsā is the means and truth is the end. Means to be means must always be within our reach and non-violence is care of the mean, we are bound to reach the end sooner or later. His idea about the relation between *Truth* and Non-violence can be best understood from his saying in "Truth and God". Gandhiji says, "Truth is my God and Ahimsa is my God, when I look for truth, Ahimsa says find it through me and when I look for Ahimsa, truth says find it through me". In relating the two, Gandhiji said truth is realized by action of love or non-violence. Only through the way of non-violence one can reach to the destination of truth, the ultimate goal of human endeavour. Gandhiji accepts the usual meaning of Non-violence or Ahimsā, i.e., non-killing and adds much more to its content. He also accept that violence or himsa means causing pain or killing any life out of anger, or from a selfish purpose, or with the intention of injuring it. Retraining from doing all that is non-violence or ahimsā one who is practicing non-violence has still strength to overpower his adversary and still his practice non-violence because non-violence or ahimsā is a conscious and deliberate.

Non-violence with Gandhi was not a mere concept but it was an article of faith, a condition of existence, a cultural necessity. He had good will even for plants and animals and insects. He often said that non-violence is meant for the bold and the brave, not for the cowards and the weak. His *Experiments with Truth* are greatest treasure of mankind although their author stood for non-possession, non-violence is meant for the strength of mind and the stout of heart. It is neither passive nor passiveness, it is active, and it is dynamic. It implies conscious suffering. Non-violence is mightier than violence, it is mightier than sword. Violence is going to be the greatest challenge of the 21st century and therein lays the relevance of Gandhiji.

According to Gandhi love has the element of sensibility and it is experiential in character. It can never be through injury or violence. If Truth-God equivalence has a special

meaning in terms of truth being the nature of ultimate reality and having an ultimate status as God has, truth as God can be realized only through love, - love for all. Truth cannot be, never will be, and reached except through non-violence or ahimsā. According to Gandhi, non-violence is the greatest and most active force in the world. He defined non-violence as – “Avoiding injury to any creature into thought, word and deed”. It is a positive force, when positively put it means love in the largest sense that means love for all without discrimination of good doers and evil doers. Non-violence does not mean meek submission to the will of the doer. Rather, it inspires man to stand against the will of the tyrant. It not only enables us to conquer the opponent but also unites with all our fellowmen. That is why it is said that non-violence involves sacrifice and suffering. Sacrifice, according to Gandhiji, is an indespensable companion of love, love demands a going beyond, a selftranscendence. Only he can love who is selfless. Who only believes in giving and not in taking. Gandhiji says “Love never claims, it ever gives, love even suffers, never resents, never revenges itself”. He holds, “In its positive form Ahimsa means the largest love, the greatest charity. If I am a follower of Ahimsa, I must love my enemy... This active Ahimsa necessarily includes truth and fearlessness.” Non-violence or ahimsā is the manifest part of truth. Men cannot reach up to the unmanifest and transcendental ground of absolute truth but they can perceive its manifestation through love. In his letter from prison to inmates of Satyagrahashram, he stated – “They are like the two sides of a coin, or rather of a smooth unstamped metallic disc. Who can say which the obverse is, and which is the reverse? Nevertheless ahimsa is the means; Truth is the end. 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. When once we have grasped this point, final victory is beyond the question” Truth or Satya is the end and it is identical with God. Non-violence or ahimsā as a means involves the human agency in a personal commitment to truth which is conceptually impersonal. Personal commitment consists in love. The concept of God too, for Gandhi is explicable as being infinitely loving as well as infinitely powerful. Hence, Truth- God equation and love being the essence of non-injury or non-violence lead us to a very important synthesis of personal and impersonal, Samkaras impersonal Brahman and Vaishnva or Christian view of God. From this view point non-violence or ahimsā is unquestionably superior to violence and injury.

Gandhi interpreted ‘Truth’ as ‘Moksha’ and Non-violence or Ahimsā as exercise in Tapas, which gives a new meaning to traditional values. Moksha for him, signified the vision of Absolute truth, to be attained by means of Tapas or self suffering. Gandhi’s all striving was moksha or self-realization. In the last part of his autobiography Gandhi holds- “My uniform experience has convinced me that there is no other God than Truth. And if every page of these chapters does not proclaim to the reader that the only means for the

realization Truth is ahimsa, I shall dream all my labour in writing these chapters to have been in vain”

Gandhiji claims to have practiced Non-violence throughout most of life and to have applied it successfully in all walls of life it was undoubtelly his basic creed and was bound up with his quest for truth. According to him, the aim of human life is to attain truth and non-violence. It is comparatively easy to achieve relative truth. However, the endeavor should be know the ultimate truth, because this results in realization of God. God is truth and love and we realise truth by loving the whole animal world including mankind. “Ahimsa is the basis of the search of truth. The search is in vain unless it is founded on ahimsa as the basis. The only means for the realisation of truth is ahimsa. A perfect vision of truth can only follow a realisation of ahimsa”. Gandhiji says, “non-violence implies as complete selfpurification as is humanly possible”. It implies “ a living faith in the existence of the soul as a part from the body”. Non-violence is soulforce. It is the power of Atman. It is power of love. “It is uttermost selflessness. Selflessness means complete freedom from a regard for one’s body”. Ahimsā or non-violence is a kind of love, i.e. the love for others. Buddhism and Jainism are infavour of non-violence or ahimsā. Gandhi provided the concept of non-violence by collecting this from Buddism and Jainism. Human body sometimes may be violent but man’s soul always in favour of non-violence. When the power of soul goes beyond the physical power then only man becomes a true man and then it can be that Non-violence is natural to man.

Practical Importance of Non-violence and Peace

we have discuss the concept of non-violence and peace from the standpoints of Gandhi. Now question remains as to the practical significance of his views in the present socities, i.e. in the present crisis of the world. Is this concept able to teach us the ethical value, need and justification for a reorientation of our being i.e. moral being and transformation of our societal aspects of existence? Are we able to adopt his method living in the present crisis of the world?

The answer would be positive, because; today our society is running through an acute crisis. Human values are deteriorating day by day at a rapid rate in each and every corner of our society. Now a day’s our education is a very limited purpose for our students. Education at present, with its emphasis on “consumerism” and competition for “achievement”, has sidelined its central concern for the full development of social, moral, aesthetic and spiritual side of human personality. Students today are moving farther away from values and ethics than ever before. At present our education and culture are mainly materialistic. So, all our thinking and activities are determined by this materialistic teaching and culture. Due to this type of learning demand of us are increasing at a rapid rate, and crossing all

the limits. To meet this limitless demand, we are becoming highly selfish and violent; we have no scope of thinking for the welfare of our near and dear ones or of the society. We don't hesitate to satisfy our own interest even at the loss of the values of our life. Mere bookish knowledge required for passing examination, but doesn't develop any values and ethics which are needed for the upliftment of the society. We all have misguided priorities today and only the proper values and ethics can guide us in the right direction. No doubt Gandhian concept of non-violence or ahimsā is an eternal principle and highlights the positive and negative aspects of human behavior. Non-violence or ahimsā is necessary for peaceful living and sustainable growth in the world. Ahimsā influences our actions and attitudes and also become our framework for living. It influences our relationship with our society and purifies our heart and clarifies our vision, all the evils of materialism, sympathy, truthfulness, sincerity, generosity and respect. Its controls human behaviours and also fulfills national wish and desire.

Conclusion

It is to be noted that the practical importance of non-violence and peace, for Gandhi, lies both in individual moral self-correction for sharpening one's own 'perfectibility' and in forming socio-cultural and political will untainted by violence. Unless there is a function of socio-cultural and political will on the foundation of non-violence, there cannot be any progress and development of humanity in the truest sense of the term because what distinguishes humanity from non-human animals is non-violence. To speak of human history is to speak of the progress of man in manifesting 'non-violence' or 'non-injury' in every aspect of his life.

Practice of absolute Non-violence or Ahimsā is not possible so long one exists physically. It is not the same as non-killing, nor it is non-resistance borne out of cowardice. It implies absence of hatred or ill will, love for wrong doer, courage in the face of violence, non-possession, breadlabour, truthfulness and freedom from possession. Gandhian concept of non-violence or ahimsā had been applicable in the past, it is applicable in present, and it will be applicable in future also. The principle of non-violence or ahimsā has a positive value of its own. This principle can bind people with love, peace and justice. Following this principle "Ramrajya" can be established.

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