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MAHATMA GANDHI'S PHILOSOPHY OF AHIMSA AND TRUTH

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ABSTRACT

The idea of truth and non-violence is at the core Mahatma Gandhi's political thought. But he himself confesses that non-violence or 'ahimsa' was not his inborn virtue. He simply states: "In the journey searching for truth I find ahimsa. I have only retrieved it, never discovered a new." Actually truth and ahimsa are closely integrated with his philosophy of life. He used to believe that ahimsa lies within the truth and similarly truth is in ahimsa. Once he thought that God is truth but later he observed that truth is God. So, he named his struggle 'Satyagraha'. The Satyagrahi will be the worshipper of non-violence which will be his life and duty.

KEYWORDS: Ahimsa, Violence, Truth, God

INTRODUCTION

According to Mahatma Gandhi, ahimsa implies uttermost selflessness. It means, if anyone wants to realize himself, i.e., if he wants to search for the truth, he has to behave in such a way that others will think him entirely safe.

According to Gandhi, this is the way of ahimsa. He did not consider non-killing alone to be non-violence. To him, non-violence is not a negative concept but a

positive sense of love. He talked of loving the wrong-doers, but not the wrong.

He had strongly opposed any sort of submission to wrongs and injustice in an indifferent manner. He thought that the

wrong-doers can be resisted only through the severance of all relations with them.

According to Gandhi, non-violence never evades violence. On the contrary, it carries

on a constant struggle against arrogance and violence. This is why he did not regard the pacifist as non-violent. He considered non-violence to be a very powerful active force. The followers of non-violence would never retreat at the sight of violence. They would rather devote themselves to the task of changing the hearts of perpetrators of violence through self-torture for establishing truth.

According to Gandhi, to move fearlessly into the dreadful jaws of violence is called non-violence. Thus, in Gandhi's concept of non-violence there was no place for timidity or cowardice. He considered violence to be preferable to cowardice. While commenting on this matter in his article entitled 'The Doctrine of the Sword', he says that, given a choice between cowardice and violence, he would prefer violence. But he firmly believed that non-violence was certainly superior to violence and forgiveness was far more manly than punishment.

Though Mahatma Gandhi accorded the principle of 'truth and non-violence' a pivotal position in all his activities all through his life, he realised that the common people of India and even the majority of the contemporary Congress leaders had not

accepted non-violence as a 'creed'. For this reason he commented that he had doubt as to how many persons fully believed in the creed of non-violence.

But he thought that his movements did not at all depend on non-violent workers as believers in the creed of non-violence. He considered it to be adequate for his purpose if they followed the print principle in practice. Like those days, today also there is acute shortage of person really believing in the creed of non-violence. Consequently, clash of narrow selfish interests, struggles for power, world-wide competition for weapons of mass destruction, struggle for establishing hegemony, etc. have brought the world on the verge of a deep crisis.

In the opinion of the followers of Gandhi, the relevance of the Gandhian concept of truth and non-violence cannot be ignored or denied at all. However, the Marxists think it to be a utopian idea as it is impossible to put the principle in practice.

According to many philosophers, God is the highest reality. However, Gandhi says that there is nothing besides Truth. So both Truth and God stand for the highest reality or the ultimate reality. And hence the two can be

identified. He said that there is no person on Earth who can deny Truth. God can be denied because the atheist does not believe in God. But even an atheist cannot deny the power of Truth. Hence God is identified with Truth in Gandhi's understanding. Gandhi went so far as to describing Truth as existence, consciousness and bliss.

According to Gandhi, Ahimsa or non-violence has a positive meaning also. According to Gandhi, non-violence means "love" in a very positive sense. It means love towards all living creatures. The concept of non-violence is extended not only as a means to human love but to love for all sentient creatures of the world. This means one should not love only human beings but every living being in the world.

When a person claims to be non-violent, he is expected not to be angry with someone who has injured him. Such a person will not wish anyone harm but instead will wish everyone's well-being, even of those who have harmed him. Such a person will not cause his perpetrator any physical harm. Thus non-violence is complete innocence.

Gandhi, however, was aware and believed that non-violence in its absolute form is not



realizable in practice. But relative non-violence can be realized in practice. Gandhi, therefore, regarded non-violence to be the law of our species. Since Gandhi recognized that the practice of total non-violence in our life is not possible, he wrote: "Man cannot for a moment live without consciously or unconsciously committing outward violence." This violence is directed against life.

It does not mean meek submission to the will of the evil-doer, but rather means putting one's whole soul against the will of the tyrant. The Gandhian concept of non-violence is in short dharma in action, and truth translated. It is important to understand that Gandhi's idea of non-violence is not a static code of morality ready for adoption.

RESEARCH WORK

According to Gandhi, Ahimsa or non-violence is the means, while Truth is the end. They are so strongly intertwined that it is impossible to separate them. According to Gandhi, Ahimsa or non-violence has to be practiced at the mental level. It means barring no ill-will against others. So, Ahimsa or non-violence is non-injury to

others, not only in the physical sense but in the mental sense also.

Gandhi is of the opinion that: "Killing or inflicting injury to life can be an act of violence only under certain conditions. These conditions are anger, pride, hatred, selfish consideration, bad intention and similar other consideration." For Gandhi, the positive aspects of Ahimsa are much more basic than its negative characters. Ahimsa is not merely refraining from causing injuries to creatures; it stands for a certain positive attitude towards other living beings that one must cultivate.

According to Gandhi, Ahimsa is nothing but Love and Love is that energy which cleanses your inner life and uplifts you. Such Love perpetuates noble feelings like benevolence, compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, generosity, kindness, sympathy, etc.

Gandhi believed that, without the practice of non-violence, Truth can never be realized. He argued that God pervades all beings and all beings are united by God. Thus, the act of unification with God is made possible through Love or non-violence. So in Gandhi's philosophy of Ahimsa, non-



violence is the cementing bond of the Universe and has its origin in God or Truth.

According to Gandhi, Truth and Non-Violence constitute the Kernel of Gandhi's philosophy. He said that Truth stands for 'reality'. By Truth, according to Gandhi, we do not mean the character of proposition which is either true or false. Gandhi sometimes described Truth as existence, consciousness and bliss (sat, cit, and ananda). At first Gandhi used to say God is Truth. But later on he converted Truth is God. Therefore, according to Gandhi Truth is God and 'Satyagraha' is 'agraha' of and thus, it means holding fast to truth. Gandhi explained the term 'Satyagraha' from various viewpoints. Satyagraha is not a weapon of the weak, the coward, the unarmed and the helpless. It is a weapon of the morally vigilant and the active. Satyagraha is not the traditional resistance of evil by evil. It is a resistance of evil by its opposite, i.e., by good.

Satyagraha is essentially based on love. In fact, according to Gandhi, Satyagraha appears to be as a religious pursuit. It rests on a religious belief that there is one God behind everything and being, and as such the same God resides in every one of us. Gandhi

also feels that a belief in rebirth is almost a pre-condition of Satyagraha. Satyagraha demands selfless and sincere pursuit of Truth without having any consideration of any advantage or gain, But, one will be able 'to walk on such a sharp 'razor's edge' only if he somehow believes that he will get the fruits of his good work, if not in this life, in subsequent life. Gandhi says, 'with the knowledge that the soul survives the body, he (the satyagraha) is not impatient to see the triumph of in the present body.'

The most effective force against these evils can be the one which would force them to evaporate, and that can be done only by Satyagraha. The aim of satyagraha is not to embarrass the wrong-doer. Its intention is to bring about, what Gandhi calls, a 'change of heart'. In fact, satyagraha is based on the pre-supposition that there are no 'enemies' or 'opponent', but that there are only wrong-doers. Satyagraha also demands extreme patience on the part of the Satyagrahi. A wrong-doer cannot see his wrong at once, he will take time to win over his anger and hatred. The Satyagrahi must wait patiently for the good sense of the wrong-doer to be aroused. Gandhi distinguishes Satyagraha from Passive Resistance. Firstly, Satyagraha



is not a passive state; in fact it is more active than violence. Secondly in passive resistance, there is an element of force; it does not completely forbid the use of violence. In Satyagraha, on the other hand violence is completely forbidden even in the face of very adverse situation.

DISCUSSION

Ahimsa or Non-Violence is the central concept of Gandhi's philosophy. According to Gandhi, Ahimsa or Non-Violence has a positive meaning also. In positive sense Non- Violence means 'love'. It means love towards all living creatures. The concept of non- violence is extended not only means to human love but love towards all sentient creatures of the world. That means one should not love only human being but every living being in the world. When a person claims to be non-violent, he is expected not to be angry with one who has injured him. He will not wish him harm; he will wish him well. He will not swear at him, and he will not cause him any physical hurt. He will put up with all the injury to which he is subjected by the wrong-doer. Thus Non-Violence is complete innocence. Complete Non-Violence is complete absence of ill-will against all that lives. Therefore, it embraces

even sub-human life not excluding noxious insects or beats. Non- Violence is, therefore, in its active form goodwill towards all life. It is pure love.

Gandhi believed that Non-violence in its absolute form is not realisable in practice. But relative NonViolence can be realised in practice. Gandhi stated that Justas the perfect straight line as understood by Euclid cannot be drawn. Similarly perfect Non-Violence cannot be attained. But limited Non-Violence can be attained. Gandhi stated that the Divine Spark is present within man and we must constantly endeavour to keep alive that Divine Spark. Gandhi therefore regarded Non-Violence to be the law of our species. But at the same time Gandhi recognised the point that the practice of total Non-Violence in our life is not possible. Gandhi wrote, 'Man cannot for a moment live without consciously or unconsciously committing outward violence.' This violence is directed against life.

The Gandhian concept of Non-Violence is dharma in action, and truth translated. It is not a static code of morality ready for adoption. It evolves and is in essence 'creativity morality', in the language of Bergson. Non-Violence is a dynamic and



creative concept centred on truth. Truth, the supreme Gandhian value, is the consummation of all that is spiritual in man. He regards violence as an evil in itself. He does not consider it to be neutral. According to Gandhi 'Ahimsa or Non-Violence' is the means; Truth is the end. They are so intertwined that it is impossible to separate them. They are the two sides of a coin.

Ahimsa or Non-Violence should practice in the mental level. It means barring no ill-will against others. So, Ahimsa or Non-Violence is non injury to others not only in the physical sense but of in the mental sense also. Hence the concept truth and non-violence according to Gandhi has a very wide application. Gandhi is of opinion that 'Killing or Injury to life can be an act of violence only under certain conditions. These conditions are anger, pride, hatred, selfish consideration, bad intention and similar other consideration. Any injury to life done under these motives is 'himsa'. Thus, the negative meaning of Ahimsa is 'non killing or non injury,' but this presupposes that a non-violent act is free from hatred, anger, malice and the like. For example, when an animal which is going to die is suffering from intense pain in that case

we may kill him to end his suffering or there may be cases when a woman has to safe dignity or owner against the criminal. In that case she can use violence in order to safe herself. So there are certain exceptions according to Gandhi to the law of violence. But for Gandhi, the positive aspects of Ahimsa are much more basic than its negative characters. Ahimsa is not merely refraining from causing injures to creature; it stands for certain positive attitude towards other living beings that one must cultivate.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

In its positive sense Gandhi said that Ahimsa represents one of the basic and essential qualities of mankind. That does not mean that violence does not have any place in life. In fact, even in preserving one's existence one has to commit himsa of one kind or the other, and yet Ahimsa is considered to be the law of our species. In fact Ahimsa is nothing but Love. Love is a kind of feeling of oneness. In an act of love one identifies himself with the object of his love, and this cannot be possible unless there is an effort to free mind from every such disposition that prevents the spontaneous outflow of love. Therefore, Ahimsa demands a sincere effort to free mind from

feelings like anger, malice, hatred, revenge, jealousy etc., because these create obstacle in the way of Love. According to Gandhi, love is the energy that cleanses one's inner life and uplifts him, and as such, love comprehends such noble feelings as benevolence, compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, generosity, kindness, sympathy etc. Gandhi believed that without the practice of Non-Violence Truth cannot be realised. 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 beings. 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 readings of religious texts than on psycho-social considerations. This is a major critical point that may be raised against the Gandhian conception of NonViolence. 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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