
PHILOSOPHY OF NON-VIOLENCE: GANDHIAN PERSPECTIVE

Romil Aryan¹, Shipra Chandra² & Satakshi Agrahari³

ABSTRACT

Gandhi was a great philosopher, lover of truth and non-violence and believed that self-realization cannot be attained without respecting the truth and practicing non-violence. So, if one wants to attain salvation one must be the lover of truth and non-violence. Gandhi uses truth and nonviolence as social and political weapons in fighting against evils and injustice. With Gandhi, the notion of nonviolence acquired a special status. He not only theorized about it but he embraced nonviolence as his ideal philosophy and way of life. His philosophy of truth and non-violence transcends all regional, religious and cultural barriers. The ideas that shaped Gandhi's nonviolence have been drawn from both Western and Indian sources. This Article explores the impact of Indian and western philosophy on Gandhi's Non-violence. The article argues that major religions of the world influenced Gandhi to preach Non-Violence. The article goes on to discuss the ethical basis of Gandhi's Non-violence and it's relevance in modern times.

¹ CNLU.

² ICFAI Dehradun.

³ ICFAI Dehradun.

Introduction

Truth and non-violence occupy very important place in the life of Mahatma Gandhi. These are also the two main tools that he used in his practical life. According to him, the truth and non-violence lead a person to be pious, understanding, and cooperative. He experimented with them with great zeal and applied them in an original way to practically all aspects of human life, especially in the political and social sphere.⁴ According to Gandhi, there is nothing invisible in violence, but nonviolence is majorly invisible, and therefore the effect is inversely proportional to its invisibility. He said that the social order must be based on truth and non-violence. Gandhi's non-violent society would be a perfect democracy if each unit of a village were also self-sufficient, independent, and free. If the state is needed, it must be non-violent in nature. Conflicts are inherent to social, economic, or political situations. The nonviolent technique demands creative and constructive results.

Impact of Indian philosophy on Gandhi

When we look at the philosophy of Gandhi, then it becomes very clear that by truth, he never referred to a particular point of view or state of things, but he indicated the concept of existence, consciousness, and bliss when he used the word truth. These concepts of existence, consciousness, and bliss were taken by Gandhi from Indian philosophy. The philosophy of Gandhi was heavily influenced by Indian and western philosophy. Various religious texts of different religions also influenced Gandhi, and Gandhi became convinced that one can reach the truth through the practice of non-violence. Non-violence was Gandhi's highest teaching because he believed that not causing harm to others and loving them is inherently important because it incorporates the feeling of oneness, which is heavily advocated by Indian philosophy. Gandhi believed that evil can't be cured by evil and that the truth is the ultimate solution to evil. According to Gandhi, the Ahimsa was not only a negative concept of not causing harm to others, but it was also a positive concept that allowed him to propagate the idea of love among people. According to Gandhi, "Non-Violence" is the means; "Truth" is the end. These cannot be separated from each other. " They are the two sides of the same coin."⁵The

⁴ Gandhi's Philosophy of Non violence, available at https://www.mkgandhi.org/africanneedsgandhi/gandhis_philosophy_of_nonviolence.htm (Visited on Feb 1,2022).

⁵ Ibid.

impact of Gandhi's philosophy has been huge on various world leaders, and his philosophy of non-violence continues to inspire many social movements across the globe.

Impact of Western Philosophy on Gandhi

The ideas that shaped Gandhi's non-violence have been drawn from both Western and Indian sources. Socrates' trial, described in Plato's *Apologies*, had a profound influence on Gandhi. In 1908, he published his work in English and Gujarati, titled *The Story of a Soldier of Truth*. Socrates was the role model for all who resisted state violence without violence. The moral principles of the *Sermon on the Mount*, interpreted in Leo Tolstoy's novel *The Kingdom of God Within You*, influenced him throughout his life. Another work by Tolstoy, *A Letter to a Hindu*, forced Gandhi to rethink the role of violence in Indian society. Tolstoy maintained that the British were able to rule India through violence because the Indians themselves had believed in violence as the basis of society. This is why they obeyed their rajas and maharajas and treated the "untouchables" with extreme cruelty. Under these circumstances, complaints from Indians about colonial violence seemed very similar to complaints from alcoholics against wine merchants. Eliminating colonial violence will not solve India's problems. It will only be resolved if the Indians make nonviolence the basis of a new India. Gandhi was so convinced of the message that he translated and published it in English and Gujarati. Gandhi's study of Western jurisprudence made him a longtime advocate for the rule of law and the legitimacy of a limited constitutional state. In the fight against violence, a state was needed as an ally. Here, Gandhi turned away from Tolstoy's radical pacifism, which rejected the state as such. In this last (1860), John Ruskin opened Gandhi's eyes to the veiled structures of violence in industrial capitalism. Gandhi published it in English and Gujarati under the title "*Sarvodaya*," a title he later gave to his own economic philosophy. Finally, the question arose of nationalism and how to free it from ethnic, religious, or terrorist violence. Here he found help in the liberal nationalism of Giuseppe Mazzini, whose *Essay on the Duties of Man*, published in 1892, became one of the recommended readings for anyone who wanted to understand the major work of Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*.⁶

Ethical basis of Gandhi's Non-violence

Gandhi was heavily influenced by Indian philosophy and Gandhi's Philosophy of Non-

⁶ Gandhi's views on Non-Violence, available at: <https://egyankosh.ac.in/handle/123456789/63080> (Visited on Feb 1, 2022).

violence was somehow based on the Indian philosophy. Gandhi was inspired by texts like Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads which talk about oneness of existence and oneness of beings. These texts emphatically declare that all human beings are ultimately one reality and hence harming anyone is equivalent to harming oneself.⁷ This teaching was also found in *The Bible and Sermon on the Mount* by Gandhi and it helped him in understanding that all human beings are ultimately one and hence compassion and love is the only way to uplift the masses and violence is only going to cause more turbulence and trouble because it will cause people to move away from truth. Satyagraha was Gandhi's practical tool for realizing his idea of nonviolence. This has been translated as passive resistance, nonviolent resistance. It literally means "Search for Truth" and contains Truth, Nonviolence and self-suffering as essential elements. He developed this technique of mass mobilization against the racial policies of the colonial rulers in South Africa with some success. Nonviolence by the very nature of things does not help protect illicit income and immoral behavior. The people and nations who will practice nonviolence must be willing to sacrifice (the nation to the last man) everything but honor. Therefore, it is incompatible with the possession of foreign countries, that is, with modern colonialism, which, frankly, relies on strength to defend itself. It was superior to armed struggle because, as Gandhi had to demonstrate in his concrete political campaigns, nonviolence was a force that could be used equally by all: children, young people and women or adults, as long as they had a living faith in the God and love for other human beings. When nonviolence has been accepted as the law of life, it must extend to the whole being and not apply to individual actions. He believed that violent methods of achieving the desired social outcome would inevitably lead to an escalation of violence. The result obtained will always depend on the methods used and he was always very aware about the means used for bringing the changes in the society.⁸ Gandhi believed that degrading any human being will lead to one's own spiritual and moral degradation. He taught that God resides in every human being and so every human being must be respected equally irrespective of any other considerations. This ethical foundation allowed Gandhi to start many mass movements aiming at emancipation of those who are suffering. The Gandhi's struggle to improve the situation of those who are suffering was based on this idea of oneness which Gandhi practiced and preached.

Religions and Non-violence

⁷ Swami Ranganathananda, *The message of upanishads* 34 (Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, 1st edn., 2019).

⁸ *Supra* note 1.

Different Indic religions have always maintained their position that non-violence is a way of salvation. Despite having massive differences between religions, one thing on which they agree is the concept of non-violence. Those religions which originated outside India also advocated non-Violence. When we look at the major religions of the world including Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity and Islam then one common thread which connects all these religions is the concept of Non-Violence. Major texts of Hindus like Bhagavad Gita and Upanishads talk about non-violence in the ultimate analysis. Jainism propagates non-violence as it's cardinal principle. Jainism believes that non-violence leads to Salvation. One of the most essential teachings of Buddha was not to do violence against any sentient being. Christianity also advocates non-violence and it has been mentioned in the Holy Bible that thou shalt love thy God and Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Etymologically Islam means peace, safety, goodwill and Salvation. Islam also like other religions is based on the principles of Love, Justice and brotherhood. Though Islam allows war against injustice in form of Jihad but it has to be done without any malice and aggression.⁹

Characteristics of Gandhi's Non-violence

According to Gandhi, Non-Violence is not the same as non-killing. Non-Violence is not non-resistance born out of cowardice. Non-Violence implies several positive values. These values include love, active, resistance to injustice, courage in the face of violence, non-possession, truthfulness and brahmacharya. Non-Violence implies bread-labor, which Gandhi derived from Ruskin and Tolstoy and ultimately from the Bible. Gandhi defined it as the 'Divine Law that man must earn his bread by laboring with his own hands.' Non-Violence is a higher value than life. Gandhi regarded Non-Violence to be an ultimate value on three counts. Firstly, it has universal application. Secondly, it enhances all other values without detracting from any. Thirdly, it is unlimited in its application and can be practiced by anyone and everyone.¹⁰ Gandhi believed that Non-violence in its absolute form is not realizable in practice. But relative Non-Violence can be realized in practice. Gandhi stated that just as 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 endeavor to keep alive that Divine Spark. Gandhi therefore regarded NonViolence to be the law of our species. But at the same time Gandhi recognized

⁹ Sheetal Kanwal, collective violence and Criminal Justice System,58-61 (Amar Law Publications, Indore,3rd ed.2021).

¹⁰ Arpana Ramchiary, "Gandhian Concept of Truth and Non-Violence"18 issue 4 IOSR-JHSS 67-69 (2013).

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. According to Gandhi Non-Violence is a perfect state. It is a goal towards which all mankind moves naturally.¹¹ According to Gandhi Ahimsa 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. 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.¹²

Conclusion

Gandhian way of struggle against the Non-Violence inspired many leaders across the globe in their fight against the injustice. Gandhian way of fight against injustice with peace became a political methodology in itself for those who wanted to challenge the powerful. His methods of political mobilization have influenced and continues to influence independence movements and social reform around the world. Gandhi's Philosophy of Non-violence can't be understood without understanding the social and cultural climate of India. Gandhi translated the highest teachings of Indian philosophy in practical life and implemented it in political and social life. Gandhi's philosophy of truth and non-violence transcends all regional, religious and cultural barriers. His methods of political mobilization have influenced and continues to influence independence movements and social reform around the world.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.