

# Gandhian Perspective of Non-Violence

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## Abstract

Gandhi's great achievement was to evolve and practice a non-violent method for conflict-resolution at the beginning of the twentieth century, which proved to be the most violent century in the annals of mankind. In the first half of the century, which almost synchronized with Gandhi's entire public life, there were two devastating world wars with a colossal loss of life. In the second half we were spared the catastrophe of a third world war, but the 'cold war' between two rival ideological-cum-military blocs brought the world to the verge of an atomic holocaust: only a 'balance of terror' between them kept the peace. So spoke Mahatma Gandhi, celebrating the need and nature of the principle of non-violence for mankind. All wise men down the ages have preached the doctrine, of love and non-violence. Zoroaster, Buddha, Mahavira, Christ, Nanak primarily emphasised a moral code that gave due status to non-violence. Non-violence is a philosophy of life, a modus operandi which has been accepted as an article of faith in the East as well as the West. But what does the word 'non-violence' mean in simple terms? To what extent can and should non-violence be exercised in daily life? And is it not true that the world today is in dire need of nonviolence?

**Keywords:** Gandhian Perspective, Violence, Non-violence, Discipline

## Objective:

The objectives of present study are:-

1. To understand the present status and trends to evolve and practice a non-violent.
2. To reveal the key variables which almost synchronized with Gandhi's entire public life?
3. Many great people have emphasised on the importance of non-violence.
4. Various interpretations of the term. Non-violence, like other benevolent principles cannot be taken to the extreme.
5. Gandhi's Ahimsa. Violence has increased in the world today. Relevance of non-violence today.

## Gandhian Perspective of Non-Violence

However, of their rivalry led to lo Gandhi's great achievement was to evolve and practice a non-violent method for conflict-resolution at the beginning of the twentieth century, which proved to be the most violent century in the annals of mankind. In the first half of the century, which almost synchronized with Gandhi's entire public life, there were two devastating world wars with a colossal loss of life. In the second half we were spared the catastrophe of a third world war, but the 'cold war' between two rival ideological-cum-military blocs brought the world to the verge of an atomic holocaust: only a 'balance of terror' between them kept the peace. Calibrated conflicts, instigated or fanned by the Superpowers, largely in Third World countries. In 1995, the then Secretary-General of the United Nations estimated that

between 1945 and 1994 there had been 127 conflicts with 22 million casualties in comparison to 88 conflicts during the first half of the century. Gandhi offered a non-violent alternative to this recurring cycle of hatred and violence. Beginning his public life in the hostile environment of South Africa, he discovered that in an imperfect and changing world, conflicts of interests within and between countries were inevitable. His technique of satyagraha sought reconciliation through dialogue and compromise, but if justice was denied, it provided for a confrontation, but it had to be a non-violent confrontation. Westers Third New International Dictionary aptly sums up this technique as one of 'achieving social and political reform by means of tolerance and active goodwill coupled with firmness in one's cause expressed through non-violence, passive resistance and non-cooperation.'

Despite these examples of non-violent struggles over the past two decades, which have highlighted the power potential of the oppressed, it must be admitted that Gandhi's ideas and methods are still appreciated by only a small enlightened minority in the world. Gandhi himself had no illusions about their ready acceptance. He did not claim finality for his views, which he regarded within a broad ethical framework as aids for bettering the lives of his fellow men; they could be altered if they did not work. Though he expounded his philosophy of life in hundreds of articles and letters, he never tried to build it into a system. Nevertheless, the truth is that more than fifty years after his death, his deepest concerns have become the concerns of thinking men and institutions working for a peaceful and humane world.

Ahimsa has been part of the Indian religious tradition for centuries: Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist. It was Gandhi's genius that transformed, what had been an individual ethic, into a tool of social and political action. This he did in the course of his twenty-year long struggle against racialism in South Africa. Since 1894 he had been pleading with the colonial regime for the removal of iniquitous curbs and disabilities from which Indian immigrants in Natal and Transvaal suffered. He made little headway. In 1906 an exceptionally humiliating law was enacted for registration of Indians in the Transvaal; Gandhi found he had reached a dead end. The colonial government in Pretoria, supported by the dominant European community, was adamant; the Government of India was indifferent, and the imperial government in London reluctant to intervene. A stage was reached in Gandhi's agitation when something more than reasoning and persuasion were demanded. It was at this critical juncture that he stumbled upon a new technique of fighting social and political injustice. He called it satyagraha (holding on to truth). Its principles were to gradually evolve in the ensuing years; its author was a man for whom theory was the handmaiden of action. Of one thing Gandhi had no doubt; it was to be a method without hatred and without violence. During the next eight years he used this method with a measure of success until 1914 when he reached an agreement with the South African government and left for India. It was as the author and sole practitioner of satyagraha that he entered the Indian political scene in 1919-20, which he was to dominate for the next three decades.

### **Gandhi's Pleas for Renunciation of violence:**

Gandhi's pleas for renunciation of violence and for non-violent resistance to aggressors fell on deaf ears; they were dismissed as the outpourings of a visionary. The Second World War lasted six years and took a heavy toll of human lives, but the Allied victory did not usher in the era of peace for which the world had longed. Gandhi was shocked by the use of the atom bomb by the United States of America against Japan: he described it 'as the most diabolical use of science'. When Jawaharlal Nehru came to see him in 1945, Gandhi closely questioned him about the atom bomb: its manufacture, its capacity to kill and poison, and its toll on Japanese cities. Nehru recalled later that Gandhi listened to him silently, and then,

'with deep human compassion loading his gentle eyes, remarked that this wanton destruction had confirmed his faith in God and non-violence, and that now he [Gandhi] realized the full significance of the holy mission for which God had created him and armed him with the mantra of non-violence'. According to Nehru as Gandhi uttered these words he 'had a look of revelation about his eyes' and he resolved then and there to make it his mission to fight and outlaw the bomb. Gandhi was assassinated in January 1948. The following year, when Nehru visited the United States, he related his conversation with Gandhi to Albert Einstein. With a twinkle in his eyes, the great scientist took a pad and pencil and wrote down a number of dates on one side, and events on the other, to indicate the parallel evolution of the nuclear bomb and Gandhi's non-violent technique of satyagraha respectively, almost from decade to decade since the beginning of the twentieth century. It turned out that, by a strange coincidence, while Einstein and his fellow scientists were engaged in researches that made the fission of the atom possible, Gandhi was embarking on his experiments in peaceful, non-violent resistance in South Africa and India; indeed, the 'Quit India' struggle almost coincided with the American project for the making of the atomic bomb.

Gandhi rejected the common belief that forces yields only to force. The principle of 'an eye for an eye', he said, 'would end up with the whole world becoming blind'. He conceded that in our present state human beings are 'partly men and partly beasts', but he believed that man's nature is not essentially evil. He did not divide mankind into two opposite categories of good and bad; there were only evil acts, and even in the wickedest of men, there was a better side, a latent spark. Gandhi's critics, however, tended to dismiss his views as the impractical idealism of a visionary which had no relevance for the modern world. In February 1938 Frances Gunther, the wife of John Gunther the American journalist, and author of the best-seller *Inside Asia Today*, wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru that she told Lord Linlithgow, the then Viceroy of India, that Gandhi had brought Indians up from the tenth to the nineteenth century but it was Nehru's task to carry them from the nineteenth to the twentieth. She was not alone in thinking that Gandhi's ideas were antediluvian and suited to a pre-industrial and pre-modern society. Most intellectuals not only in the West but in India would have endorsed her verdict. It does not seem to have occurred to them that Gandhi may have been thinking ahead of his time.

It was only in the latter half of the twentieth century that Gandhi's methods came to be invoked across the globe, in Asia, Africa, America, and Europe. In South Africa, the African National Congress carried on non-violent agitation and passive resistance for nearly forty years. Chief Albert Luthuli, the president of the ANC and a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, belonged to the Zulu warrior tribe, but was inspired by Gandhi's writings and became a champion of non-violence. The ANC was, however, unable to sustain its non-violent struggle in the face of ruthless oppression by the apartheid regime. After the massacre of Sharpeville and until the release of Nelson Mandela, the major liberation movement in South Africa took to guerilla warfare. However, the armed struggle would have been much more difficult and prolonged had not students, industrial workers, religious leaders, youth, and women's organizations joined in non-violent resistance to the racist regime on such issues as rent, consumer embargoes, and bus boycotts. Thus the liberators of the blacks in South Africa were not only the guerilla fighters, but hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children, shop assistants, and workers living in shanty towns who consciously or unconsciously adopted methods which Gandhi would have approved.

Gandhi's ideas have quelled not only struggles against foreign domination and tyrannical rule, but also crusades against the piling up of nuclear weapons and the havoc being wrought by developed countries through wanton and wasteful use of the resources of the planet. Petra Kelly, a leader of the Green Peace

movement in Germany who was influenced by the ideas of Martin Luther King and Gandhi, denounced methods of production which depended upon a ceaseless supply of raw materials and were leading to the exhaustion of natural resources and threatening ecological devastation. Speaking almost in the Gandhian idiom, she said, 'We cannot solve any political problem, without also addressing spiritual ones.'

### **Nonviolent Protestors:**

What mattered most for Gandhi and King was less the suffering inflicted than the discipline protestors displayed in the face of provocation and assault? The ability to dramatize and display tapasya was paramount to the success of nonviolent protest. Discipline mattered both in the organization of the protest and in the comportment – and constraint – of the protestors.

The need for discipline imposed a strict form and code on nonviolent action. Gandhi and King formulated a plethora of rules for nonviolent activists. They circulated rules for how to dress, how to walk, and how to talk during nonviolent marches, strikes, pickets and boycotts. In both the Salt March and the Birmingham campaign, for example, protestors had to explicitly assent to these rules in the form of a vow or pledge in order to participate. Allegiance to these rules showed that activists were willing to bear the costs and burdens of protest themselves, from the costs of self-organization to willingly accepting punishment for breaking the law. Most importantly, the rules were meant to help muster and exhibit stoic discipline in the face of threats, intimidation and outright violence.

### **Conclusions:**

Non-violence as a doctrine has been preached by all wise men from time immemorial. The saints and sages all over the world have preached the gospel of love and understanding. All differences among people can be solved through love without resorting to violent means. Mahatma Gandhi, the greatest champion of non-violence, defined it as Ahimsa, that is showing goodwill and love to an antagonist while protesting in spirit against his unjust act. It is fundamentally based on the spirituality of man. It is synonymous with moral courage. It is not mere passive courage, but is the driving force of a spirit which seeks redress of moral grievances. In today's world, non-violence has to be practiced if mankind, is to survive. Non-violence can prove a panacea for all the ill of the present-day world.

The world is desperately in need of a Messiah of peace, who can once again preach the gospel of love, understanding and universal brotherhood. Man must awaken from his slumber and take stock of the explosive situation he is living in. Before the time runs out, man must come to his senses and realize the folly of indulging in wars and violence. Ultimately, non-violence alone can provide freedom from all the ills of the society and bring about harmony in the life of the people. It is the only means of restoring sanity in the world.

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