

Gandhiji and Non-Violence

Abstract

The present century as a worthy successor to the 20 century continues to be an era of war and violence though the growth of science and technology has reached an all-time high. Violence arises due to some conflicts which are not reduced or settled through negotiations or other constitutional means. Suppressed sense of deprivation or injustice finds vent through violence and in extreme cases it leads to terrorism. The political discourse, these days, is centered on a global war on terror. And indeed, terrorists who target innocent men, women and children deserve no quarter. Countering violence with even more violence does not provide a durable solution. Conflicts can be resolved. But without worthy means, worthy ends can never be attained. All around us, we witness that violent means do not bring about lasting change that is violence cannot bring about peace. Violence only begets violence and spirals on. The answers to the various questions and problems facing humanity could be found only through nonviolence. Ahimsa is the attribute of the soul, and therefore to be practiced by everybody in all affairs of life. Gandhi gave a new dimension to Ahimsa (non-violence) - an eternal, natural and the highest human value, in theory and practice. He looked upon non-violence as a moral philosophy, a way of life and a method of action. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was an Indian-born world's mentor. His cardinal principles of Truth and Nonviolence are as important and significant as sun to our life. The message of supreme forgiveness and non-violence of the 'Sermon On The Mount' impressed Gandhiji. He extended this principle to make non-violent opposition a potent weapon. Virtues of non-violence as preached and practiced by the Mahatma are relevant even today and can be used as a potent weapon against terrorism.

The question to ask is not whether Mahatma Gandhi is relevant or not. The real issue is whether we have the courage and strength of mind to follow in his footsteps, whether we are prepared to live our lives by what he preached and most importantly, practiced. The simple truth is that instead of diminishing in relevance, Mahatma Gandhi has actually become all the more pertinent in the 21st century.

Keywords: Non-violence, Gandhiji, Weapons.

Introduction

The present century as a worthy successor to the 20 century continues to be an era of war and violence though the growth of science and technology has reached an all-time high. The root meaning of violence comes from the Latin word 'Violentia' meaning vehemence, a passionate and uncontrolled force, and the opposite of a calculated exercise of power. No country seems to have been left untouched by the phenomena of violence. But the Indian sub-continent has been suffering from a variety of violence and terrorism which includes communal, ideological, theological, ethnic, social, and cultural violence. The problem of violence has become much more complex with highly destructive weapons based on latest technology and hence results in loss of heavy life, less of actual combatants but mostly of non-combatants. Today, any large-scale war may become global and lead to the annihilation of man. Science and technology have created conditions where mankind must feel and act as one or perish. Such kind of war threatens the very existence of man. Weapons of destruction have been fashioned which can destroy not only the warring parties but the entire world. The U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. have enough atomic weapons to destroy themselves and everybody else. Different reasons underlie the rural and urban violence. Violence arise due to some conflicts which are not reduced or settled through negotiations or other constitutional means. Feelings of injustice and false ego, sometimes give rise to conflicts. Conflicts are also created or imposed upon by interested persons or groups for some ulterior motive to make some gain out of it. . In

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a multi-racial, multi-religious, multi-cultural country like India there is always a challenge on ethnic, communal or cultural issues creating conflicts. Violence is taken as a short cut method for resolution of conflicts. Today no internal conflict remains wholly internal as there are so many affiliations within and among nations that an internal conflict in one place may and does attract interference from outside. Suppressed sense of deprivation or injustice finds vent through violence and in extreme cases it leads to terrorism. The terrorist attacks on World Trade Centre in New York and Pentagon in Washington on 11th September 2001 is case of such violence. High population growth rate, unemployment social conflict (Religious and ethics), underdevelopment and poverty and territorial conflicts are major causes of terrorism in India. Root cause of such violence is hatred against an individual or group of people or society or country. Countering violence with even more violence does not provide a durable solution. Conflicts can be resolved. But without worthy means, worthy ends can never be attained. All around us, we witness that violent means do not bring about lasting change that violence cannot bring about peace. Violence only begets violence and spirals on. Violence in our world is highly unjust, highly unevenly developed and promotes greed among few, ignoring needs of vast majority of people and is heavily biased in favor of few rich nations. It is, therefore, highly necessary to creatively apply non-violent methods of resistance to save humanity. Resolution of conflict without resorting to violence is the essential condition for establishing peace in the society. The atom bomb of violence can be disarmed only by the ultimate weapon of peace. It is only on the highest levels of the human conscience that the spirit of aggression can be transformed into a spirit of conciliation.

Aim of the Study

To analyse the concept of Non-Violence of Mahatma Gandhi and its relevance in society.

The one and only silver lining on the otherwise dark horizon is the belated recognition by the humanity that violence can't be countered by violence and that the answers to the various questions and problems facing humanity could be found only through non-violence (Ahimsa). Ahimsa is the attribute of the soul, and therefore to be practiced by everybody in all affairs of life.

Towards a Non-Violent, Non-Killing and Peaceful World- Lessons from Gandhi

Gandhi is one of the greatest exemplars of non-violence the world has ever known. The doctrine of ahimsa, or non-violence, was one of Gandhi's core principles, and ultimately involved active, ceaseless love for all life. In pre-independent India struggle for freedom experienced violence. But Mahatma Gandhi used the weapon of Non-violence (Ahimsa) to resolve the conflict. The present democratic systems can overcome the problems most importantly, violence and terrorism, only when non-violence is accorded supreme status in practice as well as in principle and at social as well as individual plane. Virtues of non-violence as preached and practised by the Mahatma are relevant even today and can be used as a potent

weapon against terrorism. "We can kill terrorists with bullets, but nobody has succeeded in finishing terrorism that way. A glaring example of this was the conflict between Northern Ireland and Britain. Until some people decided to sit across and talk, there was no end to the bloodshed.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was an Indian-born world's mentor. Gandhi was a politician, philosopher, social reformer, journalist and saint—all rolled into one. United Nations announced on 15th June 2007 to declare 2nd October, Gandhi Jayanti of India, as International Day of Non-Violence in deference to the contribution Mahatma Gandhi made to humanity. He remains immortal, not because of his image but because of his ideologies. He is being recognized as a great leader of action, a Liberator and a Prophet Martyr all over the universe. After the assassination of Gandhi many people felt that Gandhi would be forgotten soon and his ideologies would fade away. But it is a fact that Gandhi and Gandhism still lives both in the hearts and minds of not only Indians but also across the people globally. When leaders like Dalai Lama, Nelson Mandela, Barack Obama and Aung San Suu Kyi follow the principles of Gandhi it is very clear that his ideologies have still relevance even today even after many years of his death. To-day there is a renewed interest in Mahatma Gandhi. Cinema makers, environmentalists, social activists, political leaders, developmental economists, educators, social scientists and others are innovatively using and advocating Gandhian ideas to address the challenges of changing world. After almost 60 years of martyrdom, Gandhi is now more relevant on global level than before. Gandhi reiterated certain eternal values and their observance in daily life. As he himself concedes: "I have nothing new to teach the people. Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills." But the uniqueness of Gandhi's teaching was that he practised before he preached. His cardinal principles of Truth and Nonviolence are as important and significant as sun to our life. Both concepts are integral to each other. No non-violence is possible without truth and no truth is possible without non-violence either. Also, we often say God is truth but Gandhiji reversed this and said Truth is God. The message of Gandhi encompasses not only ethical principles like truth and nonviolence but also guidance on practical aspects of life such as dignity of labour, simple living and thrift, healthy diet, trusteeship of wealth, cooperative communities, and protection of the environment. These values have been taught and retaught by the Upanishads, the Gita, the Buddha and Christ.

Review of Literature

Gandhi was essentially an experimental personality. He titled his autobiography as "The Story of My Experiments with Truth." Vegetarianism, passive resistance, satyagraha, Brahmacharya (celibacy), Aparigraha. (non-possession), Ahimsa (non-violence), Satya(Truth), Anasakti (non-attachment), Osteopathy, Hydropathy, dietics, fasting, penance, were all experiments deliberately and consciously carried out by Gandhi in his life time. Gandhi had influenced millions of people both in and

outside India with his unique personal traits, sincerity of thought and the magical spell of his personal charm. Generations to come, it may be," said Albert Einstein, "will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth."

An era of India's history of freedom movement is termed as the Gandhian Era. In the years since his assassination Gandhian ideas have acquired an international appeal and have been shared by individuals and by peace movements throughout the world. Mahatma Gandhi and his ideologies were quite successful among the common masses. The message of supreme forgiveness and non-violence of the 'Sermon On The Mount' impressed Gandhiji. He extended this principle to make non-violent opposition a potent weapon. Fighting against injustice without causing any harm or harboring any ill-feelings towards the enemy came to be his guiding principle. Gandhi, gave a new dimension to Ahimsa (non-violence) - an eternal, natural and the highest human value, in theory and practice. Gandhi is credited to have been the first person to show the efficacy of nonviolence in mass social and political action. He looked upon non-violence as a moral philosophy, a way of life and a method of action. For Gandhi, non-violence is an active, pure and all-timely value. Non -Violence is the strongest weapon. It is not a weapon of the weak. It has no place for cowardice. It is an active force. Non-violence is impossible without bravery / courage/ fearlessness. Doing at any cost something that one ought to do. The courage of dying without killing. Gandhi had said, "Non-Violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man".

In this regard Gandhi wrote the following in Young India:

"Means are after all everything. As the means so the end. There is no wall of separation between the means and the end."

Non-violence is the nucleus in Gandhi's ideas. In other words, his views revolved around Ahimsa and as mentioned, it is the only means to achieve Truth, and to achieve truth is the goal of one's life, or to get completeness of life. He taught us that Indian way to resolve conflict is not to struggle over values and claims to scarce resources and power in which the opponent or enemy is either neutralised or eliminated. But that our aim should be to develop harmonious relationships between different communities, castes, religious and other groups and to replace hatred with love and affection.

Gandhi demonstrated the irresistible power of Ahimsa as a political weapon and instrument of liberation. In all continents, and in almost all countries, several motivated groups of individuals who firmly believe in nonviolence have sprung up. However, it has not yet become as mainstream strategy. A few major developments stand out as one thinks of nonviolence as an effective strategy not only to counter violence, but to bring about peace in human lives as we gradually glide into the twenty first century. Several motivated scholars who developed

strong faith in the efficacy of nonviolence through their dedicated efforts and sustained critical interest added new and valuable inputs to the concept and practice of non violence as a strategy for human survival.

According to Gandhi the universal human value of Ahimsa ought to be cultivated not merely at personal level, but at social, national and international level too if we wish to avoid personal, social, national and international conflicts. It is a very powerful means to avoid conflict, since it springs from inner realisation of the equality of all human beings. His ideas based on non-violence are entirely important in the new world. They are completely relevant today and will remain so in future as well. Gandhi is not only a national leader but also an international leader who influenced many including 5 Nobel laureates for Peace— Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Dalai Lama, Aung San Suu Kyi, and Barack Obama. Gandhi remains relevant not only now but in future and as long as civilization exists. US President Barack Obama believes that Mahatma Gandhi's message is still relevant for the world. The President said Gandhi's work was "an inspiration for positive change in my own country and his example is something that I continue to admire." He had said "the non-violence practised by men like Gandhi and King may not have been practical or possible in every circumstance, but the love that they preached --their faith in human progress -- must always be the North Star that guides us on our journey." It is natural that different levels of perception developed as the Gandhian approach expanded globally. Since Gandhi represented a model value system, it is quite natural that people viewed the Mahatma from different social, political and territorial perspectives.

Conclusion

Gandhi's ideas, principles and concepts are universal and need to be followed to protect our planet from disaster. Gandhian way is the only way to reverse this process to make the twenty-first century a glorious and virtuous period of happiness and peace. Gandhiji emphasis to avoid violence at every step to establish amity, is progressively paving the path for the global understanding and global concern on this planet; the earth. May be a day will come, when the Gandhian wave of truth, non-violence and love will sweep away all the hatred and anger, leaving a peaceful world, living with Gandhi.

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