

Gandhian Method to Peace

Saikat Roy

At a time when peace is threatened by violence at the individual, group, social, national and global levels it is time that we explore the essences of Gandhian philosophy of peace and practice them in our lives for the sake of a better philosophy and life and work for a world order that would be free from violence.

Keywords: peace, Ahimsha, Satyagraha, violence, Vyakti, global peace, utilitarianism.

I

For long, peace has been an ideal that has been universally preached by individuals and religious groups. Now it is taken up by organizations specially formed to promote peace. The 20th century was the most violent period in human history. More people have suffered and have been killed by organized violence than any other time before. The wars, the genocides, the weapons of mass destruction have created such an enormous mass misery and agony that it is difficult to find any trace of hope. Therefore, Gandhi's vision of peace is most relevant today. If we wish to be nonviolent and work for peace within ourselves and in the world, there are numerous avenues of self-examination and exploration that would bear fruit, if we are courageous and patient enough to follow through. Gandhi stands as an exemplar of truth and non-violence who continues to inspire those who seek peace. Gandhi has become a synonym for non-violence and peace.

The *International Peace and Disarmament Directory* has listed down more than 350 periodicals working to promote peace. 'Peace' does not mean merely the absence of overt violence, but also the eradication of its roots, such as social and economic exploitation, corruption and concoction, injustice and inequality, political domination and manipulation. Peace should not be judged by

negative yardsticks of absence of hot war, explicit violence, control over armaments and banning of all destructive actions. The 'peace' should be defined more positively. A peaceful world should provide and create conditions where individuals can lead fuller and richer lives i.e., a balanced development of human personality in its social, cultural, political and economic aspects. Predominance of one aspect would not be conducive for peace amongst individuals, small groups, nations, states and the world community at large. It should provide for rapport between the individual and the social order and permit peaceful socio-economic changes consistent with changing times and aspirations of the people. Initiative and leadership should remain with individuals and small groups. In such an order conflicts at individuals and small groups, national and international levels will be reduced significantly. In cases where conflicts still persist there should be efforts to resolve them by peaceful means.

War appears so natural to man. Even a superficial study of history of the world reveals that it has been the aim of every monarch to wage war, expand his dominion with a view to establish an empire. Wars have been also fought for wealth and riches i.e. to loot and plunder other's territories for material profit. Even the twentieth century has seen the treacherous greed of nations and their leaders to conquer and rule over others. With the advancement of science, wars have become more and more brutal and devastating. The attempts for abandonment of wars and establishment of peace are also found in history. Gautama Buddha preached the message of ahimsa and compassion. Asoka, one of the greatest emperors, had followed the Buddha's teaching in giving up war and treading on the path of peace. Jesus Christ is described as the prince of peace. He lived and preached the message of love, forgiveness and peace. In contemporary times Gandhi has relentlessly voiced the importance of peace in human life.

II

Gandhi's concept of peace is broad-based; for him peace is rooted in the way of life. It is intimately linked with justice, development and environment. The well known peace researcher Johan Galtung has acknowledged his indebtedness to Gandhi in formulating his concept of structural and cultural violence. His advocacy of ideas

such as self-reliance and models of development focused on basic needs also have a strong Gandhian imprint. Gandhi's influence could also be found in the ideas of Bjorn Hettne who has tried to focus on the relationship between models of development and peace.

In order to grasp Gandhian concept of peace one should begin with a careful reading of his seminal work *Hind Swaraj* which he wrote in 1909, where he criticized the modern model of development as inherently violent. One who scrutinizes Gandhi's speeches, writings and actions will understand his deep commitment to the cause of peace and non-violence which was apart from his philosophy of life and his world view. In the ideal society of Gandhi's vision the organization and relationship of the members of the society must be based on the law of non-violence or love. The real task before those who dream of a peaceful and non-violent society is to practice the ideals of peace and non-violence. Gandhi has always emphasized on the transformation of the existing society into a peaceful non-violent one.

The key to understanding of the Gandhian perception of peace, and his principles, is to comprehend in depth his revolutionary mode of action which he called *Satyagraha*, and his challenging goal of *sarvodaya*, meaning the welfare and good of all. This precisely means a fuller and richer concept of people's democracy than any we have yet known. The central figure in all this is the individual, *vyakti* (in Sanskrit), the human being of spirit (soul), mind, and body - the three dimensional being who is never static, whose 'being' is intrinsically linked with his/her 'becoming'. Therefore, individual (*vyakti*) is the one supreme consideration, with his/her conscience and will, together with his/her reason to effect change.

In an age of conflict within a given nation, and in the international world, Gandhi believed that the individual must rediscover the right mind, because there are values without which he/she cannot live in society. He worked for the rediscovery of that right mind which would reach out to unity, love, peace, emphasizing that there always are, and will be, certain eternal values - ethical, spiritual, universal, which human beings need universally. Consequently, we human beings are now, in a way, unequipped to face life in a fully humane manner, and are inevitably heading towards destroying our own selves. Lauding Gandhi's views

Bharata Kumarappaun has said: 'While pacifism hopes to get rid of war chiefly by refusing to fight and by carrying on a propaganda against war, Gandhiji goes much deeper and sees that war cannot be avoided as long as the seeds of it remain in man's breast and grow and develop in his social, political, and economic life. Gandhiji's cure is, therefore, very radical and far-reaching. It demands nothing less than roots out violence from oneself and from one's environment' (Kumarappa, 1949).

The 'right mind' Gandhi envisioned is non-exclusive; it is inclusive. It is not a mind of intolerance, of accusation, or of division. Rather, it is a mind of unity, a mind that understands, a mind that has infinite love working for harmony, for peace which is a way of life, not just a cessation of war, or a recess between wars and violence; it is a spirit that heals division, which positively works for harmony within and without. Gandhi knew the reality of hatred and in-tolerance because he had experienced them in his own life in South Africa, in colonial and caste-ridden India of his time. He was convinced that no peace could be built upon exclusion, upon absolutism with a mind either in a vacuum, or filled with wrong values which must be the result if individuals made no efforts to rediscover the 'right mind'.

Gandhi argued that peace cannot be built on theories, slogans or pious programmes. There can be no peace on earth without the kind of interchange that restores human mind to the fact that all life is one, emanating from universal self. The fact of interdependence between peoples, between nature and human society, between co-existence and survival, is accepted in today's world as an imperative, in an age when scientific advancement, modern inventions, and technological progress are bywords. All forms of necessity can contribute to human freedom - material and economic need, intellectual need and spiritual need. Gandhi believed that the greatest of human needs is the need to be free from evil and untruth that are in one's own self, and in society.

Gandhi has often been described as an apostle of peace, which he certainly was. He strove and died for peace. He advocated 'peace but not at any price' (Power, 1960: 128), for his philosophy was a philosophy of commitment; it was based upon the concept of moral responsibility which underlay his ethics of intention. Gandhi's philosophy of peace is to be sharply distinguished from the

conservative plea for 'peace at any cost', which is in essence a peace for the maintenance of status quo. Peace, he advocated, is integrally related to justice. As Gandhi wrote: 'peace must be just' (*Bombay Chronicle* 18.04.1945).

One may argue that the Gandhian declarations on peace contain some practical difficulties in the present day world. But Gandhi would not countenance such a practical difficulty. He would counter pose saying: 'if an individual can practice non-violence, why not all groups of individuals and all nations' (Power, 1960: 85-86). The Gandhian concept of world peace should be viewed as an integral part of his philosophy of life and one should try to appreciate his attitude within the general frame work of his philosophy of ahimsa that is non-violence.

III

The Gandhian way of peace lies in the conviction of the efficacy of love i.e. non-violence. While conceptualizing non-violence, he was heavily influenced by the writings of Leo Tolstoy. Gandhi expresses himself as being overwhelmed upon reading Leo Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is within You* and he called himself Tolstoy's humble follower. The Gandhian way of peace springs from the basic concept of non-violence. Gandhi is of the firm opinion that war can never end wars, since violence breeds only violence. For him, the search for peace should be made through non-violence alone. Gandhi effectively used obtaining Swaraj through non-violent revolution. He said: 'I suggest to the friends of peace for the world that the Congress in 1920 took a tremendous step towards peace, when it declared that it would attain her own Swaraj by non-violent and truthful means. And I am positive that, if we unflinchingly adhere to these means in the persecution of our goal, we shall have made the largest contribution to the world peace' (Gandhi, 1929). He had no doubt that non-violence was the only means to bring peace. He said: 'The cry for peace will be a cry in the wilderness, so long as the spirit of non-violence does not dominate millions of men and women' (Gandhi, 1926).

While clarifying the conception of non-violence, Gandhi said in *Young India* (1921):

... to hurt someone, to think of some evil unto someone or to snatch one's life under anger or selfishness, is violence. In contrast, purest nonviolence is an epitome in having a tendency and presuming towards spiritual or physical benefit unto everyone without selfishness and with pure thought after cool and clear deliberations. The ultimate yardstick of violence or non-violence is the spirit behind the action.

His concept of peace and non-violence is integrally linked to his world view. Gandhi evolved his world view from a concept of 'self' and human nature. Acknowledging the inherent goodness of human beings, Gandhi emphasized that all human beings have an inherent capacity to develop their full potential of non-violence. The path of violence was seen by him as a downward path away from our humanity while the path of non-violence was closer to humanness. He believed in the unity and oneness of all including the sentient and non-sentient beings. He believed that all human beings are part of the divine and they are interdependent and interrelated. If one person gains in non-violence, the entire humanity gains with him. In such an interrelated and relational framework, nonviolence becomes the cardinal principle governing human relations.

Gandhi's concept of non-violence is closely linked to his understanding of the above interrelatedness or wholeness. Truth was fundamental in his philosophy of life. He also wanted to make discovery of truth as the principle around which the differences among human beings could be sorted out. Throughout his life he was experimenting and perfecting his notion of truth. For him truth was a sovereign principle and it includes numerous other principles. Gandhi called truth realization as the realization of the God. This quest for truth can be carried out not by any means. Violence is based on a notion that the person who employs it has the sole possession of truth. Gandhi was of the view that the truth known to human beings is never absolute but relative. Therefore a seeker of truth has to adhere to the path of non-violence or else he will not be able to be receptive to the notions of truth held by others. Gandhi wanted that all struggles and conflicts should be approached as a contestation between the notions of relative truth held by the conflicting parties. Only through a non-violent means one would be able to pursue a struggle of this kind because in it truth contestation

becomes a joint effort of both conflicting parties. In other words, it is always a joint search for truth by the conflicting parties.

For Gandhi, non-violence was a creed or an article of faith. His complete adherence to non-violence was based on principles rather than opportunism or any cost benefit considerations, although he was not unaware of its strategic value. For him, it was not a weapon of expediency. It was a spiritual weapon and he successfully employed it at the level mundane everyday life and in politics. He made it clear that it is not a weapon of the weak and the coward. The application of this principle needs greater courage and moral strength. He believed that Ahimsa or Love has a universal application and it can be employed in one's own family, society and the world at the larger level. Through the technique of non-violence a seeker of truth tries to convert his opponent by the force of moral character and self suffering. A practitioner of non-violence has to undergo suffering to penetrate into the heart of the opponent. Gandhi looked upon self-less suffering as the law of human beings and war as the law of jungle. Life based on utilitarian calculation, a counterpoint of Gandhian philosophy is the core of the liberal thinking of the West. Suffering for a worthy cause in non-Western cultures is often seen as liberative, even if it emerged as the result of the application of violence against an oppressor. The redemptive character of self-suffering was emphasized by Gandhi and it constituted a key element of his Satyagraha technique. Gandhi's commitment to non-violence evolved also from a careful reading of history and its interpretation. He came to the conclusion that it is non-violence that has sustained the world so far and will sustain it in future too. Gandhian non-violence challenges the notion that the principle is applicable in interpersonal relations and has no value in the public world. Gandhi emphasized that the law of love operates at all levels, and for him public life and values should be an echo of private life.

An integral part of Gandhi's philosophy and life's work is the notion of *ahimsa*, which literally means 'non-injury' or 'nonviolence.' For Gandhi, *ahimsa* was the belief in the sacredness of life and the refusal to do harm to living things, an interpretation that was based on the deep-rooted Hindu tradition of not doing harm. *Ahimsa* was vital to Gandhi's peace building efforts for several reasons. First, *ahimsa* means not harming others either in thought or deed.

Second, Gandhi viewed *ahimsa* as also having a more dynamic and positive state which is love (Gandhi, 1951: 109). This love serves as the means to get to the ends of truth. Third, a means which uses nonviolence to reveal truth has advantages to Gandhi because only relative truth can be attained for certain. Given this human limitation, the nonviolent means to realize one's goal guarantees that individuals will not hurt any adversary in a conflict who might be closer to the absolute truth than they themselves are. Excluding the use of violence is best, because humans are not capable of knowing the absolute truth and therefore are not competent to punish (Nakhre, 1982).

For Gandhi, a genuine process of peace building had to involve the use of nonviolent *means* to secure a sustainable satisfaction of human needs of security, identity, self-determination, and quality of life. His most serious challenge to the dominant Hobbesian discourse of power becomes apparent in his conscious break with the assumption that the nature of political power was to be found in the capacity to unleash violence, and thus, that the exercise of political power inevitably involved employing violent means of physical coercion. Instead, he offered a compelling rationale for why the principle of *ahimsa* might constitute the core of an alternative model of power. Gandhi also emphasized on the importance of passive resistance in attaining the real essence of non-violence. Passive resistance or Satyagraha, according to Gandhi, [It] is a method of securing rights by personal suffering; it is the reverse of resistance by arms. When I refuse to do a thing that is repugnant to my conscience, I use soul-force. For instance, the Government of the day has passed a law which is applicable to me. I do not like it. If by using violence I force the Government to repeal the law, I am employing what may be termed body-force. If I do not obey the law and accept the penalty for its breach, I use soul-force. It involves sacrifice of the self (Gandhi, 1963: 18-21).

One of the most important ingredients in *ahimsa* is the notion of self-suffering, a refusal to submit to injustice, and the acceptance of personal discomfort and tribulations. Gandhi says: 'Non-violence in its dynamic condition means conscious suffering' (Gandhi, 1920). He further says: 'suffering injury in one's own person is ... of the essence of non-violence' (Gandhi, 1925). While describing the importance of self-suffering in human life, he says,

'suffering is the law of human beings; war is the law of the jungle. But suffering is infinitely more powerful than the law of the jungle for converting the opponent and opening his ears, which are otherwise shut, to the voice of reason ... Suffering, not the sword, is the badge of the human race' (Bose, 1957). According to Gandhi non-violence is the most effective and greatest force that man has been endowed with. In his words, 'non-violence has proved to me that it is the greatest force in the world. It is the surest method of discovering the truth and it is the quickest because there is no other... It is the one constructive process of nature in the midst of incessant destruction going on about us ... But this non-violence is impossible without complete self-effacement' (Gandhi in his message to World Tomorrow written in 14th November, 1924 emphasized on the non-violence as the greatest force).

While talking about non-violence Gandhi laid down five simple axioms (Gandhi, 1935):

- a. Non-violence implies as complete self-purification as is humanly possible.
- b. Man for man the strength of non-violence is inexact proportion to the ability, not the will, of the non-violent person to inflict violence.
- c. Non-violence is without exception superior to violence, i.e., the power at the disposal of a non-violent person is always greater than he could have if he was violent.
- d. There is no such thing as defeat in non-violence. The end of violence is surest defeat.
- e. The ultimate end of non-violence is surest victory- if such a term may be used of non-violence. In reality where there is no sense of defeat, there is no sense of victory.

While arguing that peace cannot be achieved without no-peace Gandhi emphasized on self-purification by which true peace can be realized and this is the way by which the mantra of peace that is the creed of non-violence can be established (Gandhi, 1938). He felt that without self-purification, the observance of the law of non-violence is an empty dream (Gandhi, 1956).

Gandhi, while showing the relevance of non-violence, insisted that the only path to the world peace is a radical break in habitual

reliance by the governments on violence to achieve order. He had an optimistic view of the development of civilization for he believed that human nature had been ever working upward, that is, from violence to non-violence. Non-violence, for him, is a universal phenomenon having its relevance and significance for the past as well as the present and the future. It has been very effective and instrumental in solving all kinds of conflicts in society. However, its result depends upon its understanding and proper application.

IV

Gandhi did not consider nonviolence merely as a matter of tactic, although it certainly was effective in liberating India's people from an alien rule; as it enhanced the black movement in the USA, under Martin Luther King, Jr., in the 1960s, or as it became the basis of the liberation of the under-privileged movement under the leadership of Danilo Dolci in Italy in recent past. Between 1955 and 1968, a black-led civil rights movement swept the United States, which found in Martin Luther King, Jr. a leader capable of transforming millions of inchoate aspirations into an engine of peaceful social change. In his autobiographical essay, 'Pilgrimage to Nonviolence', Martin Luther King, Jr. tells how he 'came upon the life and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi' and 'became deeply fascinated.' He wrote:

Gandhi was probably the first person in history to lift the love ethic of Jesus above mere interaction between individuals to a powerful and effective social force on a large scale. For Gandhi, love was a potent instrument for social and collective transformation. It was in this Gandhian emphasis on love and nonviolence that I discovered the method [for social reform that I had been seeking [or so many months...]. I came to feel that this was the only morally and practically sound method open to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom.

On the 27th of September 1984, while addressing the U.N. Assembly the then President of America Ronald Reagan remembered Gandhi saying: 'all problems could be peacefully resolved, if adversaries talk to each other on the basis of love and truth. All through the history the way of truth and love has always won. This was the

belief of Gandhi and his vision and its remains good and true even today.’ After the demolition of World Trade Centre US President, George W. Bush, remembered Gandhi. After the said tragedy a new youth organization named ‘We want Peace not War’ in the US. There is another organization known as, ‘Seeds of Peace’. Wolfowitz, U.S. Deputy Defense Secretary has suggested and advised that Palestinians should adopt Gandhian principles saying: ‘If they adopt Gandhian way, they could in fact, make an enormous change very quickly. I believe the power of individuals demonstrating peacefully is enormous.’

Some years back the Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh has signed a peace accord with the Shanti Bahini of Chittagong Hill Tracts ending two decades of insurgency lodged by tribal people living in the area. The accord was hailed both in and outside Bangladesh. The crux of the peace accord is that it was accomplished without any outside mediation and interference. The peace accord was possible because the then Government of Bangladesh believed in non-violence and also wanted to develop the hill areas of Bangladesh in a peaceful atmosphere.

Peace is an outgrowth of respecting life of others. Peace demands participation of people valuing each other and having mutual respect, regardless of class, caste and creed. The present global situation demands the total participation of the people in identifying problems, designing solutions, implementing those solutions and evaluating the outcome of the actions for peace for creating a sensible human situation. The Gandhian philosophy of peace can come handy in this task at hand.

References

- Borman, W., 1986. *Gandhi and Non Violence*. New York: State University of New York press.
- Bose, A., 1987. *Dimensions of peace and non-violence: The Gandhian perspective*. Delhi: Gyan Publishing House.
- Bose, N.K, (eds.), 1957. *Selections from Gandhi*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House.
- Galtung, Johan, 1969. ‘Violence, Peace, and Peace Research’, *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 6, No. 3: 167-191.
- Galtung, Johan, 1996. *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace, Conflict, Development*

- and Civilization*. London: Sage Publications.
- Gandhi, M.K., 1919-31. *Young India*. Ahmedabad.
- Gandhi, M.K., 1920. 'The Doctrine of the Sword', *Young India*, 11 August.
- Gandhi, M.K., 1925. *Young India*, October.
- Gandhi, M.K., 1926. 'Non-Violence- The Greatest Force', *The Hindu*, 8 Nov.
- Gandhi, M.K., 1929. *Young India*, Ahmedabad, 21st March.
- Gandhi, M.K., 1933-48. *Harijan*, Ahmedabad.
- Gandhi, M.K., 1935. 'The Greatest Force', *Harijan*, 12 October.
- Gandhi, M.K., 1938. 'Message to Jaipur Rajya Praja Mandal', *Harijan*, 4 June.
- Gandhi, M., & M. H. Desai, 1942. *Non-violence in peace & war*. (Vol. 1). Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House.
- Gandhi, M.K., 1951. *Satyagraha*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, p. 109.
- Gandhi, M.K., 1956. *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House.
- Gandhi, M. K., 1963. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Press, Vol. X, pp. 18-21.
- Green, M., 1983. *Tolstoy and Gandhi, men of peace: A biography*. Basic Books.
- Iyer, Raghavan, N., 2000. *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Iyer, Raghavan, N., (eds.), 1991. *The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Kumarappa, B., 1949. 'Editor's Note', in M. K. Gandhi: For Pacifists. Ahmedabad.
- Mishra, A.D., (eds.), 2002. *Rediscovering Gandhi*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications.
- Misra, K. P., & S. C. Gangal, (Eds.), 1981. *Gandhi and the contemporary world: Studies in peace and war*. Delhi: Chanakya publications.
- Misra, R. P. (ed.), 1989. *Gandhian Model of Development and World Peace* (No. 1). www.conceptpub.com.
- Nakhre, Amrut. W., 1982. *Social Psychology of Non-Violent Action: a study of three satyagrahas*. Delhi: Chanakya Publications.
- Paul F. Power, 1960. *Gandhi on World Affairs*. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd.
- Weber, T., 1991. *Conflict resolution and Gandhian ethics*. South Asia Books.