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NON-VIOLENCE THE CORE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE IN GANDHI

Attainment of truth in the Gandhian philosophy demands love. To cling to the truth is to stand up against untruth and evil. But the law of love demands that violence and hatred should be excluded from the fight for truth. Resistance to untruth is a duty and one cannot resist without using force. But the force to be employed is the force of love—a love that proves itself in suffering. For Gandhi,

Ahimsa (non-violence) and truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them. They are like the two sides of a coin, or rather a smooth unstamped metallic dice. Who can say, which is the obverse and which is reverse.¹

I. Sources of Influence

Many factors influenced Gandhi in the development of his concept of *ahimsa*. In the first place, mention may be made of the Hindu traditions and in particular the concept of non-violence which had great influence on his life and religious convictions. The traditions of non-violence in Hinduism go back as early as the Vedic times. Certainly, the melody of non-violence rings in the peace hymns of the Vedas. In *Taittiriyaopanishad* we read, "Om! May we develop strength: illumined may our study be! May there be no dispute; Om! peace, peace Hari Om."²

In the *Katha Upanishad* we read the story of Yama telling Nachiketa that the vision of the self can be attained only by those who have not committed violence. The Upanishad lays down, not causing any

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1. N.K. Bose, *Selections From Gandhi* (Ahmedabad: Navjivan Publishing House, 1950), p. 13.
 2. Chattopadhyaya, *The Upanishads* (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1896), Vol. II, p. 4.

injury to any being, as one of the duties of the householder. Penance, charity, straight-forwardness, non-violence and truthfulness are characteristics of a religious man.³ Therefore, not to cause injury to other creatures is the duty and *dharma* of all men.

The spirituality of *Bhagavad Gita* also had great impact on the development of Gandhi's concept of non-violence. The *Gita* teaches the doctrine of *nishkama karma* (disinterested action) to promote non-violence.

A person who is born with the noble temperament is born with the following qualities. He is not afraid of anybody. He is pure in mind, established in knowledge and *yoga* (performance of action), charitable with senses controlled, performer of sacrifices and studies the Vedas regularly. He is devoted to austerities (*tapas*), is simple, *non-violent*, truthful, gentle, without anger, detached towards the fruits of action, tranquil, merciful, modest, steady, brilliant, patient, saintly unbiased and without any pride. The twenty-six qualities are the ingredients of the *sattavika prakriti*.⁴

The influence of Hindu traditions on Gandhi's non-violent thinking is evident in his own words:

I must unclaim any intention of straining the meaning of Hinduism or the *Gita* to suit any preconceived notions of mine. My notions were an outcome of a study of the *Gita*, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Upanishads* etc.⁵

Other religions of Indian origin such as Jainism and Buddhism had their own significant impact on Gandhi's concept of *ahimsa*. Christianity also had influenced him greatly. He accepted the *ahimsa* preached and practiced by Jainism and Buddha's teachings of compassion and love towards all living beings. Addressing the monks Buddha once said,

Now this is what you must practice well, my monks: our tempers must remain unruffled, no evil sound shall issue from our lips;

3. *Chandogya Upanishad*, II, 17.4.

4. *The Gita*, 16, 1-4.

5. M.K. Gandhi, *Non-violence in Peace and War* (Ahmedabad: Navjivan Publishing House, 1942). Vol. I, p. 13.

we will remain friendly and sympathetic in a temper of loving kindness without secret malice, and we will irradiate our personality with loving feelings, starting thence we will then irradiate the whole world with broad, deep, unlimited feeling free from wrath and rancour. This is what you must practice well my friends.⁶

Gandhi also acknowledges his indebtedness to three great minds, Thoreau, Ruskin and Tolstoy. He says,

Moreover, you have given me a teacher in Thoreau, who furnished me through his essay, the duty of *civil disobedience*, scientific confirmation of what I was doing in South Africa. Great Briton gave me Ruskin, whose *Unto This Last* transformed me over night from a lawyer and city-dweller into a rustic living away from Durban on a farm, three miles from the nearest Railway Station: and Russia gave me in Tolstoy a teacher who furnished a seasoned basis for my non-violence.⁷

The Sermon on the Mount in the New Testament also influenced the Gandhian concept of non-violence in no small measure.

Then came the Sermon on the Mount. It was the New Testament which really awakened me to the rightness and value of passive resistance. When I read the Sermon on the Mount, such passages as 'resist not him that is evil; but whoever smiteth thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also, and love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven', I was simply overjoyed, and found my own opinion confirmed where I least expected it.⁸

Thus Gandhi was influenced by various factors and personalities in his pursuit of non-violence. However it should be stated that first and foremost he was influenced by the non-violent traditions of Hinduism.

6. T.K.N. Unnithan and Yogendra Singh, *Traditions of Non-violence* (New Delhi: Arnold Neinemann, 1933), p. 86.

7. M.K. Gandhi, *Non-violence in Peace and War* (Ahmedabad: Navjivan Publishing House, 1942), Vol. I, P. 168.

8. M.K. Gandhi, *Science of Satyagraha* (Ahmedabad: Navjivan Publishing House, 1949), p. 1.

II. Non-violence: Its Meaning

The term *Non-violence* is not an exact equivalent for the sanskrit word, *ahimsa*. While writing in the Indian languages, and sometimes even in English, Gandhi used the sanskrit word rather than its English equivalent. *Ahimsa* constitutes the very core of Buddhism and Jainism and Vaishnavite Hinduism to which Gandhi-family belonged.

1. Ahimsa contains the positive value of love

The term *ahimsa* connotes the positive value of love rather than the negative value of abstinence from harming other living beings. God, who in the Vedantic tradition is assumed to be both immanent and transcendental, has love as one of His attributes. Immanent love is therefore, an essential ingredient of immanent justice which operated in the universe. When it manifests itself in human action in the world, love takes the form of *ahimsa*. According to Gandhi, "In its positive form, *ahimsa* means the largest love, the greatest charity."⁹ *Ahimsa* moreover, "binds us to one another and to God. *Ahimsa* and love are one and the same thing."¹⁰

2. Violence and Non-violence as Values

Gandhi makes the following observation :

Though there is enough *repulsion* in nature, she lives by attraction. Mutual love enables nature to persist. Man does not live by destruction. Self-love compels regard for others. Nations cohere because there is mutual regard among individuals composing them. Some day we must extend the national law to the universe, even as we have extended the family law to form nations - larger family.¹¹

In this statement Gandhi admits that "repulsion" or "destruction" (i.e. violence) is also a law of nature, like non-violence, and opens up the question of the efficacy of the latter over the former. As facts both are immanent in the world as law of Nature. Moreover, if violence and

9. N.K. Bose, *Selections from Gandhi*, p. 156.

10. M.K. Gandhi, *Truth is God* (Ahmedabad : Navjivan Publishing House, 1959), p. 17.

11. M.K. Gandhi, *Young India* (March 2, 1922).

non-violence are mere facts of nature, there is nothing left for us to choose between them, because no choice of facts is possible without a prior choice of values. The fact that Gandhi upholds non-violence as against violence, which are both immanent in the world, shows that he, in fact, regards both of them as values rather than facts, and considers non-violence to be a higher value than violence. This precisely is the meaning of his statement that "we must extend the national law to the universe." If the law was already operative in the whole universe, there is no reason why it should require an effort on our part to extend it to the universe. It is because Gandhi, in fact, regards non-violence as a norm, an ultimate value, that he talks of upholding and extending it.

Gandhi tries to justify his choice of values by arguing that non-violence represents a "higher law" than violence. For he says, "I have found that life persists in the midst of destruction. Only under that law would a well-ordered society be intelligible and life worth living."¹²

3. Non-violence as Higher Value

The statement "destruction persists in the midst of life" would be as valid as Gandhi's statement that "life persists in the midst of destruction" from the factual point of view, and there is nothing to tell us whether we should prefer destruction to life or vice versa. Only if we make a prior value choice in favour of non-violence, it is possible for us to oppose destruction, the consequence of violence. Secondly, whether a "well ordered society" is a desired objective and whether a particular type of life is worth living, depend similarly on prior value presuppositions. Thirdly one "law" can be "higher" or "lower" than another only if the term "law" really means a value. Even the "higher" or "lower" may mean two different things: it may mean an ultimate value (higher) or a value relative to the same ultimate value (lower) in a hierarchical or axiological gradation of the same value, or it may mean a subjective preference for one ultimate value against another. Now, violence and non-violence being two opposite values, they cannot be higher or lower in the former sense. When Gandhi regards non-violence as "higher" than violence, he is obviously making a subjective choice between the two ultimate values.

12. *Ibid.*, (October 1, 1931), Vol. XIII, No. 30, p. 278.

4. Justification for the Choice of Non-violence as a Higher Value

Gandhi seeks to justify his choice between the two ultimate values of violence and non-violence by resorting to a teleological view of history as a movement towards the realization of non-violence; in other words, by denying the claim of violence as an ultimate value. Gandhi observes:

If we turn our eyes to the time of which history has any record down to our own time, we shall find that man has been steadily progressing towards *ahimsa*. Our remote ancestors were cannibals. There came a time when they were fed up with cannibalism and they began to live on chase. Next came a stage, when man was ashamed of leading the life of a wandering hunter. He, therefore, took to agriculture and depended principally on mother earth for food. Thus from being a nomad he settled down to civilized stable life, founded villages and towns, and from member of a family he became member of a community and a nation. All these are signs of progressive *ahimsa* and diminishing *himsa* (violence). Had it been otherwise, the human species should have been extinct by now, even as many of the lower species have disappeared.... If we believe that mankind has steadily progressed towards *ahimsa*, it follows that it has to progress towards it still further. Nothing in this world is static. ... If there is no progression, then there is inevitable retrogression. No one can remain without the eternal cycle, unless it be God Himself.¹³

Following the Hindu tradition, Gandhi believes in the existence of the "eternal cycle" organized and presided over by God. The fact remains that Gandhi's preference for non-violence against violence is based on a subjective evaluation of ultimate values made with reference to the conception of immanent love which in turn is an attribute of an immanent and transcendent God. So we can say that non-violence is an ultimate value in Gandhian thought.

5. Rational Justification of Non-violence

Gandhi was aware of the fact that his conception of non-violence as an ultimate value had extra-mundane implications, and that this might

13. M.K. Gandhi, *Harijan* (August 11, 1940), Vol. VIII, No. 26, p. 244.

detract from the rational appeal of non-violence. So he tried to satisfy the rational spirit of his time by declaring that the ideal of non-violence could be upheld on purely rational grounds, without any reference to God. He says, "It is unnecessary to believe in an extra-mundane power called God in order to sustain our faith in *ahimsa*."¹⁴

The rational justification for non-violence rests on three main arguments. First, Gandhi argues that non-violence satisfies the test of universal applicability, a test that, according to Gandhi, an ultimate value ought to satisfy itself. He argues that it is equally applicable to all countries and all peoples, irrespective of age or sex.¹⁵

Secondly, it enhances all other values without detracting from any of them.¹⁶ Finally, there is no limit, says Gandhi, to the degree or extent to which non-violence can be applied; the greater the application of non-violence, the greater will be the realization of justice.¹⁷

6. The Practicability of Non-Violence

Like other values in Gandhian thought, non-violence is not wholly realizable in practice. What can be realized is relative non-violence, which is nothing more than an approximation to the ultimate value of non-violence.

"Perfect non-violence", Says Gandhi, "is impossible so long as we exist physically. . . . Perfect non-violence while you are inhabiting the body is only a theory like Euclid's point or straight line, but we have to endeavour every moment of our lives."¹⁸

Non-violence as an ideal, therefore, means in practice the maximum possible relative non-violence which an individual is capable of at a given moment.

It can be stated that even the relative non-violence has to be defined as clearly as possible, so as to give a sense of direction to human action

14. N.K. Bose, *Selections from Gandhi*, p. 7.

15. M.K. Gandhi, *Harijan* (September 5, 1936), Vol. IV, No. 30, p. 236.

16. M.K. Gandhi, *Young India* (August 8, 1929).

17. M.K. Gandhi, *Harijan* (November 4, 1939), Vol. VII, No. 39, p. 237.

18. *Ibid.*, (July 21, 1940), Vol. VIII, No. 23, p. 212.

aimed at the realization of non-violence as an ultimate value. The following paragraphs will show how Gandhi explains the essential characteristics of non-violence.

7. Non-violence is not the same as Non-killing

i) *From man's biological nature*

Man's biological needs make it impossible to accept complete non-killing as an ideal. "It is impossible to sustain one's body without the destruction of other bodies to some extent."¹⁹

ii) *Out of Duty*

Apart from man's biological needs, there may be occasions when killing one form of life or another would be a duty. Gandhi, therefore, distinguishes three different types of killing which are justified:

- for sustaining other bodies;
- for protecting those under their care;
- some times for the sake of those whose life is taken.²⁰

Man cannot sustain his body without killing some form of life for his food, and such destruction of life is, therefore, justified.²¹ Health and hygiene also require the destruction of some lower form of life. "We recognise the duty of killing microbes by the use of disinfectants. It is violence and yet duty."²² Again destruction of animal life that causes injury to human life is also a matter of duty. Hence he supports the killing of monkeys which destroy food crops and fruit, carnivorous animals, poisonous snakes etc.²³ Gandhi says,

Even man-slaughter may be necessary in certain cases. Suppose a man runs amuck and goes furiously about sword in hand, and killing any one that comes in his way, and no one dares to capture him alive. Any one who despatches this lunatic will earn the

19. M.K. Gandhi, *Young India* (November 4, 1926), p. 1198.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 1197.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 1197.

22. *Ibid.*, (October 21, 1926), p. 958.

23. M.K. Gandhi, *Hindu Dharma* (Ahmedabad: Navjivan Publishing House, 1950), p. 104.

gratitude of the community and be regarded as a benevolent man. From the point of view of *ahimsa* it is the plain duty of every one to kill such a man.²⁴

The protection of one's ward presents a special type of problem in which one's own life is not directly involved, but only indirectly as the shield for another life that is unable to defend itself. In such a case, Gandhi believes that if the non-violent method fails to dissuade the party which threatens the life of the ward, then the guardian or protector would be justified in killing the assailant. "He who refrains from killing a murderer, who is about to kill his ward (when he cannot prevent his otherwise) earns no merit, but commits a sin; he practices no *ahimsa* but *himsa* out of a fatuous sense of *ahimsa*."²⁵

Gandhi states:

Just as a surgeon does not commit *himsa* but practices the purest *ahimsa* when he wields his knife on his patient's body for the latter's benefit, similarly, one may find it necessary under certain imperative circumstances to go a step further and save life from the body in the interest of the sufferer. It may be objected that whereas the surgeon performed his operation to save the life of the patient, in the other case we do just the reverse. But on a deeper analysis it will be found that the ultimate object sought to be served in both the cases is the same, viz. to relieve the suffering soul within from pain. In the one case you do it by severing the diseased portion from the body, in the other you do it by severing from the soul the body that has become an instrument of torture to it. In either case it is the relief of the soul within from pain that is aimed at, the body without the life within being incapable of feeling either pleasure or pain.²⁶

So Gandhi regards the killing of a living being for its own sake under certain circumstances as not only consistent with, but also necessary for non-violence. We have certain cases in which Gandhi acted in this manner. Once a calf was maimed and lay in agony in Gandhi's Ashram. The veterinary surgeon who was consulted declared the case to be past help

24. M.K. Gandhi, *Young India* (November 4, 1926), p. 1197.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 1197.

26. *Ibid.*, (October 4, 1928), p. 857.

and past hope. On Gandhi's request a doctor administered a poison injection to the calf and thus killed it in a couple of minutes in his presence. This was not only a case of simple killing, but a sacrilage from the view point of the orthodox Hindus, who regard the cow as a sacred animal, but Gandhi stoutly defended his position against all attacks from his coreligionists.²⁷

Harold Blazer, a country doctor of Colorado had an imbecile daughter of thirty-two, who was without arms or legs speech or thought. When at the age of 61, in 1925, Dr. Blazer felt that his own end was near, he chloroformed his daughter to death, because, as he told the court, there would be no one to look after her. Gandhi was asked by correspondents for his views on Dr. Blazer's action, and he said that although he thought that the doctor's act "betrayed want of faith in the humanity of those round him, such killing, if it is done bonafide, will certainly not count as *himsa* as defined by me."²⁸ Gandhi also said,

Should my child be attacked with rabies and there was no helpful remedy to relieve his agony, I should consider it my duty to take his life. Fatalism has its limits. We leave things to fate after exhausting all the remedies. One of the remedies and the final one to relieve the agony of a tortured child is to take his life.²⁹

In Gandhi's opinion,

The fact is that *ahimsa* does not simply mean non-killing. *Himsa* means causing pain to or killing any life out of anger, or from a selfish purpose, or with the intention of injuring it. Refraining from so doing is *ahimsa*.³⁰

Thus the motive behind the act is a basic consideration for Gandhi in deciding whether a particular act of killing amounts to violence or not. "Even though the outward act may be the same, its implications will vary according to the motive prompting."³¹

27. *Ibid.*, p. 857.

28. *Ibid.*, (December 9, 1926).

29. *Ibid.*, (November 18, 1926).

30. *Ibid.*, (November 4, 1926), p. 1197.

31. *Ibid.*, (December 9, 1926).

Therefore, Gandhi's position can be summed up as follows in his own words:

To conclude then, to cause pain or wish ill to or take the life of any living being out of anger or a selfish interest is *himsa*. On the other hand, after a calm and clear judgement to kill or cause pain to a living being with a view to its spiritual or physical benefit from a pure, selfless intent may be the purest form of *ahimsa*. Each such case must be judged individually and on its own merits. The final test as to its violence and non-violence is after all the intent underlying the act.³²

8. Non-violence is not Non-Resistance born out of Cowardice

Gandhi holds, "He who has not overcome all fear cannot practice *ahimsa* to perfection."³³ For,

Non-violence presupposes ability to strike. It is a conscious deliberate restraint upon one's desire for vengeance . . . The desire for vengeance comes out of fear of harm, imaginary or real. A man who fears no one on earth would consider it troublesome even to summon up anger against one who is vainly trying to injure him.³⁴

Himsa, he holds, is the extreme limit of forgiveness. But since forgiveness is the quality of the brave, *ahimsa* is impossible without fearlessness.³⁵

When the choice is between violence and cowardice he would support the former. One who is unable to be bravely non-violent in the face of physical danger to his life, family, property, religion etc., ought to use violence in order to defend these things.³⁶ Once the people of a village told Gandhi how they had run away when the police were looting their houses and molesting their women folk, because he had asked them to be non-violent, Gandhi "hung his head in shame" and advised them that for cowards it was much better to defend their families and properties by violence than to run away.³⁷

32. *Ibid.*, (October 4, 1928), p. 857.

33. *Ibid.*, (December 9, 1926).

34. *Ibid.*, (August 12, 1926), p. 1169.

35. *Ibid.*, (November 4, 1926), p. 1197.

36. N.K. Bose, *Selections from Gandhi*, p. 162.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

There are three ways of defence according to Gandhi. The best is defence that is based on non-violence. The second best is violent defence. The worst form of defence is submission or running away out of fear.³⁸

Therefore, non-violence in Gandhian thought is positive in content and must not be confused with all types of non-resistance. Cowardice or negative non-resistance is worse than violence.

9. Non-violence Implies Several Positive Values

Since non-violence is an expression of love, it follows that it is far more positive than mere abstinence from physical violence.

The principle of *ahimsa*, says Gandhi, "is hurt by every evil thought, by undue haste, by lying, by hatred, by wishing ill to anybody. It is also violated by holding on to what the world needs."³⁹

The various positive attributes of non-violence mentioned by Gandhi may be briefly summarised as follows:

a) Love

Love is the very basis of non-violence and therefore, relative non-violence in each particular case must also be associated with relative love. Every non-violent act must be characterised by the total absence of hatred or any other form of ill-will. The adversary must be treated with good will, respect and sympathy. The suffering must be born entirely by the believer in non-violence without the slightest feeling of anger or hatred towards the oppressor.⁴⁰

b) Active Resistance to Injustice

Love for the wrong-doer, however, does not mean acquiescence in his act. It follows from the positive character of non-violence that injustice in any form ought to be resisted by those who believe in it. Non-violence, therefore, involves active resistance to injustice everywhere. Gandhi states,

38. *Ibid.*, p. 163,

39. M.K. Gandhi, *Truth is God* (Ahmedabad: Navjivan Publishing House, 1959), p. 32.

40. M.K. Gandhi, *Hindu Dharma*, p. 186.

But it (non-violence) does not mean helping the evil doer to continue the wrong or tolerating it by passive acquiescence. On the contrary, love, the active state of *ahimsa*, requires you to resist the wrong-doer . . .⁴¹

"No man could be actively non-violent and not rise against social injustice, no matter where it occurred."⁴²

c) *Courage in the Face of Violence*

As already explained, courage in the face of violence is an essential attribute of non-violence because cowardice is the very antithesis of non-violence and even worse than violence.

d) *Non-possession*

According to Gandhi, exclusive possession is incompatible with love and therefore, with non-violence. Besides, possession necessarily includes the seeds of exploitation and since exploitation is the negation of non-violence, non-possession is an essential attribute of non-violence.⁴³

e) *Truthfulness*

Truthfulness is also an inseparable ingredient of Non-violence. Gandhi holds, "If non-violence of thought is to be evolved in individuals or societies or nations, truth has to be told, however harsh or unpopular it may appear to be for the moment."⁴⁴ "To say or write a distasteful word is surely not violence when the speaker or writer believes it to be true. The essence of violence is that there must be a violent intention behind a thought, word or act, i.e., an intention to do harm to the opponent so-called."⁴⁵

f) *Brahmacharya*

Brahmacharya is also implied in non-violence without which freedom from passions is inconceivable. Literally *Brahmacharya* means the path of God-realization. It includes "control in thought, word and action, of

41. N.K. Bose, *Selections from Gandhi*, p. 33.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

all senses at all times and in all places."⁴⁶ Therefore, an individual practising *Brahmacharya* is absolutely free from passions. Gandhi believes that it is possible to practise such *Brahmacharya* to the fullest extent, although he admits his own failure to do so.⁴⁷

But this is to be understood in a broad sense of the term only. For Gandhi,

The ordinary accepted sense of *Brahmacharya* is the control in thought, word, and action of animal passion. And it is quite proper thus to restrict its meaning. It has been thought to be very difficult to practise this *Brahmacharya*.⁴⁸

Yet this form of *Brahmacharya* is of the essence because the control of every other sense shall be added unto the individual who is not swayed by carnal desire even in his sleep.⁴⁹

10. Non-violence Implies Bread-Labour

a) *Manual Labour*

The principle of bread-labour, which Gandhi derives from Ruskin, Tolstoy, the *Bhagavad Gita* and Bible, is defined by him as "the divine law that man must earn his bread by labouring with his own hands."⁵⁰ He calls it *Yajna* (sacrificial rite) which has been enjoined by the *Bhagavad Gita* (chapter 3) on all. In practice since nine-tenths of the human race lives on manual labour anyway, the principle of bread-labour amounts to the compulsory performance of some manual labour on the part of the remaining one-tenth. In the given conditions of the India of his time, he considered spinning to be an ideal form of bread-labour.⁵¹

b) *Requisite for Non-violent Life*

Bread-labour is one of the most important requisites to a non-violent life. It is "the first moral law of life" in Gandhian thought.⁵² The rela-

46. M.K. Gandhi, *Young India* (June 5, 1924), Vol. VI, No. 23, p. 186.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

50. N.K. Bose, *Selections from Gandhi*, p. 50.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

52. N.K. Bose, *Studies in Gandhism* (Ahmedabad: Navjivan Trust, 1947), p. 15.

tionship between non-violence and bread-labour has been explained by Gandhi himself in the following words:

Service is not possible unless it is rooted in love or *ahimsa* . . . Thus service is again impossible without bread-labour, otherwise described in the *Gita* as *Yajna*. It is only when man or woman has done body-labour for the sake of service that he or she has a right to live.⁵³

c) *Bread-labour and Simplicity of Life*

If every one performed bread-labour,

our wants would be minimised, our food would be simple. We should then eat to live, not live to eat. Let anyone who doubts the accuracy of this proposition try to sweat for his bread, he will derive the greatest relish from the production of his labour, improve his health and discover that many things he took were superfluities.⁵⁴

d) *Bread-labour as remedy for the ills of Life*

Gandhi states,

If all laboured for their bread and no more, then there would be enough food and enough leisure for all. Then there would be no cry of over-population, no disease and no such misery as we see around. Such labour will be the highest form of sacrifice. Men will, no doubt do many other things either through their bodies or through their minds, but all this will be labour of love for the common good.⁵⁵

e) *Non-violent Social Changes and Reduction of Inequalities*

Gandhi believes in the efficacy of bread-labour for bringing about social changes in a non-violent way.

Obedience to the law of bread-labour will bring about a silent revolution in the structure of society. Men's triumph will consist

53. M.K. Gandhi, *Young India* (September 20, 1928), p. 835.

54. M.K. Gandhi, *Harijan* (June 29, 1935), Vol. III, No. 20. p. 156.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 156.

in substituting the struggle for existence by the struggle for mutual service. The law of the brute will be replaced by the law of man.⁵⁶

According to Gandhi, bread-labour will be a potent means for the reduction of inequalities, economic as well as social, and it will be absolutely essential for the success of the constructive programme and of *Satyagraha*. Bread-labour will establish the bond of love through common voluntary labour among all members of the society. It will also reduce our wants, simplify our lives and thus promote the virtue of renunciation which is one of the essential elements of non-violence. Therefore, Gandhi makes the following significant observation: "Bread-labour is a veritable blessing to one who would observe non-violence, worship truth and make the observance of *Brahmacharya* a natural act."⁵⁷

In Gandhi's philosophy of *Satyagraha* every disciplined *Satyagrahi* was to strictly adhere to the law of bread-labour as it promoted individual moral renewal which in turn effected social changes totally on non-violent terms.

11. Non-Violence as a Higher Value than Life

a) *The priority of Non-violence as a Value*

It has been already stated that certain types of killing are regarded by Gandhi as acts of *ahimsa*. What he means here is that *ahimsa* is to him a higher value than life, and whenever a life has to be taken for the sake of *ahimsa*, there would be nothing immoral in it. A lower value is being sacrificed for the sake of a higher value. This is further proved by the fact that Gandhi does not restrict such sacrifices of life only to cases where it is necessary for the sake of the victim. What is more important is that a non-violent person must always lay down his life in the face of violence, provided he has true non-violence within him, that is, if he is not afraid and bears no ill-will against the assailant.

b) *Soul, a Higher Reality*

To a large extent, this line of thinking must have been the result of Gandhi's belief that there is a soul that is separable from the body and it is

56. *Ibid.*, p. 156.

57. N.K. Bose, *Selections from Gandhi*, p. 51.

the soul that is real and the body unreal or only a lower form of reality. "The body itself is a house of slaughter and therefore, *moksha* (salvation) and eternal bliss consist in perfect deliverance from the body, and therefore all pleasure, save the joy of *moksha*, is evanescent, imperfect."⁵⁸ Since "all life in the flesh exists by some *ahimsa*, it follows that a votary of *ahimsa* always prays for ultimate deliverance from the bondage of flesh."⁵⁹

This realization comes from a knowledge of the *Atman* or the self. "He who seeks refuge in God ought to have a glimpse of the *atman* that transcends the body: and the moment one has a glimpse of the Imperishable *atman* one sheds the love of the perishable body."⁶⁰

c) To Sacrifice Life for Ahimsa

What is of importance for us is to note that non-violence demands the sacrifice of one's life, if necessary, in Gandhi's system of values. It may be argued that the soul of the assailant would also be delivered from the bondage of the flesh if he should be killed instead of being allowed to kill, and that from the point of view of non-violence it would be better to kill a violent man than the sacrifice of the life of a harmless man. But Gandhi regards killing for one's own sake as a form of *himsa*, and therefore, the negation of *ahimsa*. Therefore, one's own life must always be sacrificed in the cause of *ahimsa*. To quote Gandhi, "when a man is fully ready to die, he will not even desire to offer violence. Indeed, I may put it down as a self-evident proposition that the desire to kill is in inverse proportion to the desire to die."⁶¹ In Gandhi's view therefore, "the fear of death is thus the greatest obstacle in the way of our realizing the true nature of *ahimsa*."⁶²

12. Some Critical Remarks

Gandhi was criticised by the orthodox Hindus on two grounds with regards to his views on non-violence; first that his views were opposed to the law of *karma*, and second, that it had introduced an artificial distinction between the life of human beings and that of animals which was not

58. M.K. Gandhi, *Hindu Dharma*, p. 195.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 220.

60. M.K. Gandhi, *Harijan* (September 1, 1940), Vol. VIII, No. 29, p. 268.

61. N.K. Bose, *Selections from Gandhi*, p. 160.

62. M.K. Gandhi, *Hindu Dharma*, p. 225.

permitted by traditional Hindu religion or philosophy. The first criticism was mainly voiced on the occasion of the killing of the agonized calf in Gandhi's *ashram* in 1928. The trend of the criticism is summed up by Gandhi himself: "If you believe in the law of *karma*, then your killing of the calf was a vain attempt to interfere with the operation of that law."⁶³

The argument is that the agonized condition of the calf was the result of its own *karma* and by killing it Gandhi had interfered with that law and thus committed immorality. Thus interpreted, the law of *karma* would also rule out any kind of purposive activity, and especially other oriented activity, since everyone enjoyed the fruits of his own *karma* and must not be helped or hindered by others, and lead to a philosophy of complete inaction and fatalism. This is, in fact, what had happened to Hindu society for many centuries and why the idea of social service was completely alien to the Hindus, Buddhists or Jains until the Renaissance-cum-Reformation of the second half of the 19th century.

Gandhi sought to justify his action in terms of the doctrine of *nishkama karma* of the *Gita* in the following words:

I firmly believe in the law of *karma*, but I believe too in human endeavour. I regard as the *summum bonum* of life the attainment of salvation through *karma* by annihilating its effects by detachment. If it is a violation of the law of *karma* to cut short the agony of an ailing animal by putting an end to its life, it is no less so to minister to the sick or try to nurse them back to life. And yet if a man were to refuse to give medicine to a patient or to nurse him on the ground of *karma*, we would hold him to be guilty of inhumanity and *himsa*. Without, therefore, entering into a discussion about the eternal controversy regarding predestination and free will, I will simply say here that I deem it to be the highest duty of man to render what little service he can.⁶⁴

As regards the second objection, the religious and philosophical traditions of Vedantic Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism make no distinction between human and non-human life. The traditional theistic Hindu

63. M.K. Gandhi, *Young India* (October 11, 1928), p. 869.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 869.

position is that God pervades everything in the world. So human beings and animals are all divine. So the critics argued that Gandhi was influenced by the Western ideas when he supported the killing of injurious animals. In Gandhi's opinion, "there is no fundamental difference between the monkey- nuisance and human- nuisance. Society as yet knows no means by which to effect a change of heart in the monkeys, and their killing may, therefore, be held as pardonable, but there is no evil-doer or tyrant who need be considered beyond reform. That is why the killing of a human being out of self-interest can never find a place in the scheme of *ahimsa*."⁶⁵

Man is responsive to moral appeal, unlike the animals, because he has the faculty of reasoning which an animal lacks. Referring to the killing of animals injurious to man Gandhi observes:

Such killing becomes a duty. The question may arise as to why this rule should not also apply to human beings. It cannot, because however bad, they are as we are. Unlike the animal, God has given man the faculty of reason.⁶⁶

Gandhi has cautioned us against an utilitarian interpretation of his approach to the question of killing.

My fear, however, is that proceeding on my analogy some people might actually take it into their head summarily to put to death those whom they might imagine to be their enemies on the plea that it would serve both the interests of the society and the 'enemies' concerned, if the latter were killed. In fact I have often heard people advance this argument. But it is enough for my purpose to know that my interpretation of *ahimsa* affords no basis whatever for such an argument, for in the latter case there is no question of serving or anticipating the wishes of the victims concerned. Finally, even if it were admitted that it was in the interest of the animal or the enemy in question to be summarily despatched, the act would still be spelt as *himsa* because it would not be altogether disinterested.⁶⁷

65. *Ibid.*, (October 18, 1928), p. 881.

66. M.K. Gandhi, *Harijan* (May 5, 1946), Vol. X, No. 13, p. 113.

67. M.K. Gandhi, *Young India* (November 18, 1928), p. 919.

Although the motive is important according to Gandhi, it is not a sufficient condition for killing. The own interest of the victim is of the utmost importance, and therefore, the circumstances in which the killing is done are as important as the motive.

A reference to both intent and deed is thus necessary in order to finally decide whether a particular act or abstention can be classed as *ahimsa*. After all, intention has to be inferred from a bunch of correlated acts.⁶⁸

Thus *ahimsa*, for Gandhi, is a higher value than *himsa*. In his philosophy it is raised to the status of an Ultimate Value but within the limits of certain praxeological relativity. The application of the principle of *ahimsa* in the *Satyagraha* movements too takes on this spirit, for *ahimsa* is not treated in *Satyagraha* as an abstract ideal. In the development of the principle of *ahimsa* Gandhi demonstrates a keen sense of moral and ethical outlook.

68. *Ibid.*, (October 18, 1928), p. 882.