

Gandhian concept of peace and non-violence: A means of socio-political progress

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ABSTRACT

M. K. Gandhi was a social and political thinker and a great philosopher of his time. Apparently it seems that the concept of peace and non-violence as he conceived of is nothing new. We have already found these concepts in Indian philosophy. In Buddhism, we found the concept of ahimsa in the form of 'Panchshil', whereas in Jainism, the practice of 'mahavrat' and 'anuvrat' proves it. Besides this, the entire Yoga philosophy stands upon the concept of 'eight fold path' in which we found the idea of peace and non-violence.

So a pertinent question may knock at the back of the mind: what is as new about the concept of peace and non-violence as adopted by Gandhi? This paper is all about in search of the answer to the above question. In the paper, our intention is to focus on the uniqueness of Gandhian idea of peace and non-violence. It is quite true that in the pages of Indian philosophy, philosophers often argue for these. But in our opinion, Gandhi is one who brings the concept from theory into practice. In other words, he showed that how can peace and non-violence be one of the powerful medium of social progress. He applies these concepts to the society for the welfare of large scale mass.

He derived the basic concept of peace and non-violence from classical Indian thought but practiced them in his life and implemented them in practical field to redress the sufferings of humanity. He made no distinction between ideas and action, individual ethics and corporate ethics. Not only that, Gandhi also made some useful policies like non-cooperation, Satyagraha, fast unto death, peaceful strike following these ideals. So we find this part of Gandhi more unique and interesting to explore. We would therefore like to focus on the practical application of the concepts to the society as a means of socio-political progress.

Keywords: Panchshil, Jain ethics, Yoga philosophy, non-violence, corporate ethics, individual progress, social progress.

Introduction:

The concept of nonviolence has been having an important value in almost every religion all over the world for many centuries including “Sanatana Dharma” or Hinduism. The concept of nonviolence has been discussed in Hinduism’s one of the most valuable spiritual scripture, Bhagavat Gita repeatedly and in other related ancient Indian scriptures too. In Hinduism, the concept of nonviolence or any wrong deed is not considered as an act only. It has a larger concept. In Hinduism, nonviolence is not only about not harming or showing violence to others but it has three dimensions. It is said in Hinduism that one should not harm anyone or shouldn’t do any wrong deed against any person from physically (Kaya), mentally (Mana) and by words (Bakya) too. It means when we think or imagine of harming someone or we utter any word wishing to harm anyone, these acts are also considered as violence and equally unethical to committing any harm in reality or physically. From this discussion we can realize the depth of the concept of nonviolence in Indian tradition and in legacy of rich Indian civilization.

Following the Sanatana Dharma, many other religious or spiritual or philosophical school of thoughts came in on Indian soil gradually in course of time like, Jainism, Buddhism, Ajivika, Sikhism and so on and all of them gave priority to nonviolence.

The three dimensional concept of nonviolence had influenced M.K.Gandhi also. He also appealed to follow this idea in every day life and here Gandhi becomes different from the most. He didn’t talk about theoretical part of nonviolence only, he focused on practical application of the same in daily life to make this society a better one.

But despite accepting the concept of nonviolence as discussed above, Gandhi argued against impractical applications of nonviolence too. He said, it is not possible or practically acceptable that one should not commit any kind of violence in his/ her whole life. A person has to commit some basic violence to survive on this planet as we kill something to feed up ourselves, we kill insects while walking on the ground etc. At the same time Gandhi supported violence as an act of self defence. He cited, even a woman can stab a person with a knife to keep her dignity intact.

Gandhi talked about other side of nonviolence also. He observed that in general, common people stay away from killing any tiny creature too and try to find out any other alternative to resolve any issue like, if a dog gets mentally ill and behaves in dangerous way, still people don’t kill instantly and keep it at any less populated place and leave it to die naturally. But Gandhi said, if this kind of irreversible illness happens to any human being, he/ she, the patient’s death shall be fasten by medical means like euthanasia and as it is not possible in case of other creatures, it is fine to kill them to give relief from illness and to protect common people from their violence. Even Gandhi supported the concept of giving a child relief from any incurable illness or disease by executing euthanasia for his/ her good. There is no logic or meaning of keep waiting for his/ her natural death and depending on destiny or fate. We can see that the concept of nonviolence to Gandhi was

not very flat as it is believed wrongly in general but it had many logical and practical layers instead.

Concept of nonviolence:

In Gandhian concept of nonviolence, the act of nonviolence in human life can be accepted in practical field if it is not caused or influenced by either anger or hatred or ego or selfish will or any type of bad intentions. The decision of the act of nonviolence should be wise. It should not be influenced by any vested interest.

Indian philosophy or spiritual beliefs maintain that a human being is combination of a mortal body and an immortal soul. It is said in Bhagavat Gita that a soul can not be killed, touched or changed by anything. Swami vivekananda has compared the character of soul with rays of light as if we throw a light on any dirty place or on any good stuffs, the quality of light doesn't get changed and in the same way the quality of soul is unchanged forever. As per Gandhian thought, even when a man is committing violence influenced by negative side of his character, he/ she is committing by own body and the soul remains same and any kind of dirt doesn't touch the soul. As it is observed in Indian civilization that we must hate the sin but not the sinner because the sinner is not only the body, there is an eternal and pure soul inside him/ her and that makes the sinner invaluable or priceless identity on this planet. A sinner can be transformed with proper initiatives.

According to Gandhi people commit violence from their internal weakness, committing violence doesn't represent strength, but people take the path of violence as it is a faster and easy way. But violence is just wastage of internal quality energy and it leads to negativity only. Gandhi observed that showing love against love or showing nonviolence against nonviolence are not actually examples of real nonviolence as there is no stimuli to act in nonviolence way. But one should follow the way of nonviolence despite facing violence or unwanted situations. But at the same time Gandhi reminded us that staying away or keeping silence can not be considered as nonviolence as it is proof of weakness. A tiger kills a deer and eats that but it doesn't mean that the deer represents nonviolence. It is her physical weakness. If the deer was stronger than the tiger, the picture would have been different.

We should remember it also that Gandhi didn't want people to commit any aggressive or harmful act to any living creature unnecessary. Gandhi maintained that patience is the prime criteria to nonviolence. We should have adequate patience in every day life as time will turn the mind of the sinner or the person who commits nonviolence because the eternal soul that lies in everyone will guide that person to purify himself/ herself. We must learn to forgive people in maximum cases as Gandhi advised, forgiving is the purest religion or noble practice to follow.

Gandhi observed that the concept of nonviolence is applicable to irrespective of religion, caste, race, nationality, gender etc. and the state should also follow it. But Gandhi strongly believed that it is not possible to follow nonviolence without having complete faith and

without surrendering self to God. Gandhi didn't take nonviolence as a political path but he said it should be the ultimate goal of our lives too.

We can realize one thing from this above discussion that Gandhi wanted the implementation of nonviolence at each and every stage of our society to make this society and the world on whole more beautiful and peaceful place to live. We can feel the importance and need of Gandhi's desired and dream society nowadays more as we are going through several social, political, religious, financial unrest.

Importance of nonviolence:

Gandhi not only talked about the importance of nonviolence but he implemented in his own life too. He followed the way in own political career. He has given importance to another dimension of spirituality, *Satyagraha* (insistence to truth). This dedication to truth is also based on spirituality. Active and nonviolent resistance is had been considered as *Satyagraha* by Gandhi. He mentioned that Indian ancient texts like *Upanishads*, *Bhagawat Gita*, messages of Jesus Christ, Raj Yoga by Swami Vivekananda influenced his philosophy of nonviolence and eagerness to stick to truth in any phase of life.

Gandhi reminded that insistence to truth and nonviolence are not passive resistance, these are active ones because in passive resistance a person keeps or suppresses hatred and wishes to take revenge also but can't do that due to law and other social structures which restrain him/ her. But in nonviolent philosophy, one doesn't suppress anything inside against another person, he/ she forgives the sinner and shows love for him/ her. The wise and patient person waits for a complete positive change in sinner from within. A permanent change happens from inside and a sinner becomes a wise person too when we don't act in violent way in response to that person's act. A person expects or assumes the same kind of act after committing any violent act, but when he/ she witnesses different (positive) response and in continuous way, that persons starts thinking in different way too. This is the beginning of a permanent internal change. It takes time for sure but as **Mundaka Upanishad** cites, "**Satyameva Jayate**" (Truth Only Triumphs) and that is why we all should stick only to truth always.

Gandhi advised that a person who believes in nonviolence or insistence to truth, these qualities must reflect in his/ her every day life's acts. These qualities must be lived practically instead of talking about those as theories. A person must have a positive and bold character and he/ she must have purity in own thought process. His/ her another quality will be having a balanced and disciplined life.

Apart from these, in everyday normal life, one should not show any violence to friends, coworkers, family members and anyone with whom we interact and we should always trust people as without trust and belief, a life becomes skeptical and messed up. Along with this, a person must be psychologically prepared to sacrifice anything against trust. Nothing is bigger than truth in life. Only truth must be given given the ultimate priority. Nonviolence and insistence to truth, these two concepts are too deep and these determines a person's

quality of life. We observe that now modern science and specially psychological studies are given priority to mental stability and balanced emotions, Gandhi had mentioned earlier too that a person has to have a balanced emotional state of mind. One should not be impulsive. Self control plays very important role in our lives. So we must have patience and we should have ability to act after thinking and evaluating our act in advance. Another practical part of this Gandhian philosophy is having a liberal mentality. A rigid brain can't do anything big. We must practice to liberate our minds at every moment of our lives. As Swami Vivekananda has also echoed that **“expansion is life, contraction is death”**. If we get stuck into a limited thought, our life ends there. And a rigid brain is source of all kinds of evil acts. It doesn't have ability to accept things against own thought process or opinions. These kinds of habits or practices make a society unstable and violence prone. That is why Gandhi advised to liberate our mind.

Gandhi emphasized the importance insistence to truth mentally (Mana) and by words (Bakya) too along with relevance of the same in our acts. The idea should be in our mind and this habit will reflect in our words and acts too. This process is applicable to everything in our lives as Swami vivekananda also mentioned that we become what we think. Our thoughts shape our life and personality. Gandhi repeatedly reminded that we should act as we say. There should not be single tiny difference between our commitments and acts. The person whose promises or commitments don't reflect in his acts, loose trust and other people's confidence on him/ her. So if we talk about nonviolence and take oath to stick to truth always, our acts must reflect those too. If we fail to maintain these in practical life, personal and social unrest start.

Gandhi gave priority to other quality habits of our lives also - capability to take orders and complete the work in time, punctuality, maintaining work schedule and keep track of everyday activities etc. These are related to personal disciplines. If a person is not disciplined in regular activities, he/ she can't practice or adapt higher philosophy and ideologies. Small practices make us ready to go for bigger one as elementary responsibilities prepare us to take bigger and deeper responsibilities.

Conclusion: Gandhi had taken a deep thinking to implement ancient Indian ideologies in practical life to make this life better one and to enhance its quality. And along with individual enhancement, Gandhi gave priority to society's enhancement too. As we discussed that Gandhi gave priority to behaving properly to coworkers and other people in the society we meet to, we can make our work place a better one by following this ideology. Good habits that Gandhi asked to follow in work place, can be termed as corporate ethics in today's time. We have all the quality teachings and knowledge from our ancestors that they scripted for us in all spiritual scriptures, we just need to implement those in our practical life to have a better social and personal life. Calm and peaceful personal and social life are the keys to get success in other dimensions of life like - career growth, financial growth, spiritual growth etc. because we can't concentrate on anything if our personal and social life are unstable. Gandhi's concept regarding implementation of nonviolence and insistence to truth was very practical and needed. We must rethink on

these quality teachings of ancient India and Mahatma Gandhi to live a better and quality life instead of continuous sufferings as we witness today.

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