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GANDHIAN PHILOSOPHY OF NON-VIOLENCE

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Abstract

Gandhian philosophy, epitomized by Mahatma Gandhi's principle of nonviolence or Ahimsa, remains a compelling and relevant approach to conflict resolution and social change in our contemporary world. This research paper delves into the core principles of Gandhian nonviolence, exploring its historical significance and enduring impact on global movements for peace and justice. Gandhian nonviolence is based on the profound belief that all life is interconnected and that violence begets violence. It emphasizes the power of moral and spiritual strength over brute force, advocating for transforming individuals and societies through empathy, compassion, and self-sacrifice. By promoting dialogue and understanding, Gandhi envisioned nonviolence to foster reconciliation and bring about lasting social harmony. Despite the passage of time, the Gandhian philosophy of nonviolence continues to resonate with people seeking peaceful solutions to contemporary conflicts, including environmental issues, socio-economic disparities, and geopolitical tensions. By encouraging introspection, nonviolence empowers individuals to confront injustice and discrimination with love and understanding. Gandhian philosophy is an enduring beacon of hope in a world plagued by violence and division. Its emphasis on inner transformation and the pursuit of Truth fosters a deep responsibility towards humanity and the environment. By embracing the principles of nonviolence, we can pave the way for a more compassionate, just, and harmonious world for future generations.

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Introduction

Truthfulness and nonviolence played a crucial role in Mahatma Gandhi's life, serving as fundamental principles that he actively employed in his practical endeavors. Gandhi believed that adherence to truth and nonviolence could cultivate a person's piety, understanding, and cooperation. He enthusiastically experimented with these principles, applying them innovatively across various facets of human existence, particularly within the realms of politics and society. Gandhi emphasized that while violence is evident and tangible, nonviolence often remains unseen, leading to its impact being inversely proportional to its invisibility.

According to Gandhi, the foundation of a just social order should rest upon truth and nonviolence. In his vision, a nonviolent society would exemplify a flawless democracy only if each unit within a village achieved self-sufficiency, independence, and freedom. Recognizing the inevitability of conflicts in social, economic, or political scenarios, Gandhi advocated for the nonviolent approach, emphasizing the need for creative and constructive resolutions. In such situations, negotiations are essential, unleashing the forces of understanding and goodwill.

Truth has the power to address not only domestic issues but also to resolve global problems. In South Africa, Gandhi employed this very principle to challenge the government's harsh and unjust policies. Additionally, Gandhi drew inspiration from diverse religious texts, ultimately becoming convinced that the pursuit of truth could be achieved through the practice of nonviolence. Nonviolence stood as the paramount principle for Gandhi, reflecting his belief in the intrinsic importance of avoiding harm and embracing love towards others—a concept deeply rooted in Indian philosophy's advocacy for unity. Gandhi firmly held that addressing evil required abstaining from perpetuating it, with Truth serving as the ultimate remedy for overcoming the problem of evil. For Gandhi, Ahimsa extended beyond merely refraining from harming others; it encompassed the positive concept of fostering love among people. According to him, "nonviolence" served as the means, and Truth represented the end, inseparable components of the same coin. Gandhi's philosophy left a profound impact on numerous global leaders, and his advocacy for nonviolence continues to inspire various social movements worldwide.

Non-violence: Gandhi's perspective

Gandhi bestowed a unique stature to the idea of nonviolence. In addition to his theories, he made nonviolence his ideal way of thinking and living. She helped us understand that the nonviolent

philosophy is a weapon that anybody may attempt and is not just for the weak. Gandhi did not originate nonviolence. He is referred to as the father of nonviolence, nonetheless, as, in Mark Shepard's words, "he took nonviolent action to a level never seen before." Gandhi denigrated violence and made a distinction between physical and passive forms of it. Consciously or unknowingly, passive violence is practiced on a regular basis. It continues to be the gasoline that keeps physical violence burning. Gandhi is derived from the Sanskrit word "Ahimsa," which means "damage," and meaning "violence." Gandhi opposes violence because he believes it feeds hatred. If it turns out that coercion is used to do good, nothing can be done in the long run and the solution is just temporary. A real nonviolent activist does not use violence against others; instead, he embraces it against himself. In English, ahimsa simply means "nonviolence," but it goes beyond abstaining from physical aggression. Ahimsa means total nonviolence, meaning that neither physical nor passive violence exists. Ahimsa is interpreted as love by Gandhi.²

Gandhi attempted to link the idea of nonviolence to his notion of love—doing good even to oneself—as well as the negative condition of doing no harm. However, this did not imply that he had to stand by while the oppressor carried out his crimes or put up with any kind of subjugation or dominance. Gandhi, on the other hand, created a strategy for battling oppressors by distancing himself from them. Gandhi links this to the issue of methods and ends as well as his conception of Truth by equating love with nonviolence. Gandhi's worldview was so entwined with the concepts of love and Truth that it was hard to distinguish between them. Ahimsa was ultimately the Truth and the method for him. Put differently, weapons belong to a chosen few, but anybody can use nonviolence as a weapon. Gandhi thought that although humankind cannot achieve perfection, we can still achieve our goals as long as we keep a balance between our methods and our purposes. Gandhi believed that since force is inimical to human needs, it will destroy Truth, wherever it may exist. Gandhi came to view Ahimsa, or nonviolence, as the sole standard by which human behavior could be evaluated. The greatest virtue that distinguished civilized humans from animals was this. Gandhi's overall strategy was extremely adaptable in many respects, yet this served as his primary point of departure. Put simply, an act motivated by a desire to do no damage to others served as the sole indication of truth. Gandhi was aware that the solution he was providing to combat injustice and all forms of dominance was idealistic.³ Limits were required in order to realize this

² Gandhi's Philosophy of Non-violence, India, available at: https://www.mkgandhi.org/africaneedsgandhi/gandhis_philosophy_of_nonviolence.htm.

vision. Gandhi, however, emphasized the necessity to refine this style of warfare. This entailed willingly enduring pain for one's cause, defying the criminal's will, and putting up a valiant fight against the oppressor. Self-assurance combined with satyagraha was a tool of moral persuasion rather than a "weapon of the weak" or cowardice. Using autonomy served as a sort of stand-in for using force against other people. The fundamental component of Gandhi's nonviolent approach to dispute resolution was his refusal to resort to violence and to inflict pain without giving in to humiliation and dominance. Gandhi is against the utilitarian philosophy, which puts means before aims.⁴

Gandhi thought that total nonviolence was almost impossible to achieve. However, one can practice relative nonviolence. Gandhi said that drawing a line exactly as Euclid meant would not be possible. In a similar vein, absolute nonviolence is unattainable. Limited nonviolence can be achieved, nevertheless. According to Gandhi, there is a divine spark within every human being, and it is our ongoing goal to preserve this flame. Gandhi therefore believed that nonviolence was the rule of our species. Gandhi understood, however, that it is difficult to live a life of total nonviolence at the same time. "Man cannot exist for even a moment without external violence, conscious or unconscious," wrote Gandhi. These acts of violence are meant to harm life. Gandhi believed that nonviolence was the ideal condition. The inherent direction of all humankind is towards this end. Ahimsa is a means to the end; the Truth is the goal, according to Gandhi. They are inseparable due of their strong connection. These are the two halves of a single coin. According to Gandhi, the advantages of ahimsa outweigh its disadvantages in terms of importance. Ahimsa is a good attitude toward other living things that is necessary, not only abstaining from doing damage to them cultivated.⁵

The Ethical Basis of Gandhi's Nonviolence

Gandhi was highly inspired by Indian philosophy, and his nonviolent ideology was partially founded on it. Gandhi was motivated by literature like the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads, which discuss the oneness of existence and beings. These scriptures emphasize that all human

⁴ Arpana Ramchiary, "Gandhian Concept of Truth and Non-Violence" 18 issue 4 IOSR-JHSS 67-69 (2013).

beings are ultimately a reality, and hence harming anyone means harming oneself.⁶ Gandhi drew inspiration from teachings in the Bible and his Sermon on the Mount, leading him to believe in the oneness of humanity. He advocated compassion and love as the means to uplift society, rejecting violence as it veers people away from truth. Satyagraha, Gandhi's practical tool for nonviolence, involved passive resistance and searching for truth, emphasizing elements of Truth, nonviolence, and self-suffering. Successful in mobilizing against racial policies in South Africa, Gandhi saw nonviolence as a universal force applicable to all, transcending age and gender. He opposed colonialism, asserting that nonviolence demands sacrifice for justice and is incompatible with the possession of foreign territories. Gandhi believed violent means would escalate the conflict, emphasizing the importance of ethical methods in societal change. He asserted the equal respect for every individual, as any humiliation leads to spiritual degradation.

This ethical foundation enabled Gandhi to launch several popular movements aiming at the emancipation of the oppressed. Gandhi's battle to better the condition of people who suffer was founded on the principle of oneness, which Gandhi practiced and taught.⁷

Impact of Gandhi's nonviolence on various social movements

Gandhi's approach to nonviolence has inspired many leaders around the world to fight against injustice. Gandhi's approach to combating global injustices evolved into a political tactic for individuals seeking to oppose the powerful. His political mobilization techniques affected, and continue to influence, independence and social reform movements worldwide. His nonviolent resistance helped eliminate British rule in India and motivated current civil disobedience campaigns all over the world. The African American civil rights struggle is unquestionably one of the most significant events in American history. Martin Luther King Jr., an American Baptist clergyman and activist, led the decade-long movement, citing his unwavering trust in Gandhi's beliefs and philosophy. King referred to Gandhi as one of those who greatly showed the work of God's spirit. He employed Gandhi's ideology significantly in the civil rights struggle, where participants were well trained in Gandhi's manner. Even after King got the Nobel Peace Prize in December 1964, he cited Gandhi as his source of inspiration. He maintained that this approach to racial injustice has a proven track record of effectiveness. Gandhi utilized it beautifully to confront

⁶Swami Ranganathananda, *The message of the Upanishads* 34 (Advait Ashram, Kolkata, 1st edition, 2019).

⁷ *Supra* Note 1.

the might of the British Empire and free his people from the political dominance and economic exploitation that they had been subjected to for generations.⁸ Gandhi's effect on South African politics began decades before Mandela became the leader of the anti-apartheid struggle. According to lawyer Brijgal Pachai, "Gandhi received his political baptism in South Africa." Gandhi created a civil disobedience strategy in response to discriminatory policies that limited the rights of Indians who had migrated there. By the mid-twentieth century, Gandhi's thought had been profoundly engrained in South African minds.⁹ The African National Congress, at the forefront of the anti-apartheid struggle since the 1940s, drew substantial influence from the Gandhian philosophy of nonviolence. Gandhian principles of Truth and nonviolence, foundational in philosophy, hold universal significance according to Gandhians. In the contemporary context, Mahatma Gandhi's teachings are more pertinent than ever, addressing widespread issues of greed, violence, and consumerism. The Gandhian approach of popular mobilization has proven effective globally, evidenced by leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. in the U.S., Nelson Mandela in South Africa, and Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar. The Dalai Lama emphasizes the need for Gandhian philosophy in the present global conflicts between peace and war, reason and materialism, and democracy and totalitarianism.¹⁰ The anti-corruption campaign led by Anna Hazare in India likewise drew largely on Gandhi's non-violent doctrine, and it too earned widespread public support and placed pressure on those in power.

Conclusion

Gandhi, a profound philosopher and advocate of Truth and nonviolence, believed that self-realization hinges on embracing Truth and practicing nonviolence. To attain salvation, one must be devoted to Truth and nonviolence, according to Gandhi. He wielded these principles as social and political tools against injustice and evil, and his philosophy transcends regional, religious, and cultural boundaries. Drawing inspiration from both Western and Indian sources, including the trial of Socrates in Plato's Apologies, Gandhi opposed violence, asserting that it breeds hatred and only yields temporary good. A genuine nonviolent activist willingly endures violence against oneself without perpetrating it on others. Ahimsa, translated as nonviolence, encompasses more than just

⁸ Adrija Roychowdhury, "150 years of Gandhi", The Indian Express, Oct. 2, 2018.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Gandhian Ideologies, India, available at: <https://www.drishtiiias.com/to-the-points/paper4/gandhian-ideologies>.

physical restraint. It signifies a complete absence of both physical and passive violence. Gandhi, equating Ahimsa with love, sought to link nonviolence not only with harmlessness but also with the positive aspect of doing good, even to those causing harm. However, Gandhi emphasized that this did not entail enabling aggressors or passively enduring oppression. Instead, he developed a technique to resist oppressors by distancing oneself from them. For Gandhi, love, nonviolence, and Truth were interconnected, making it challenging to separate them. He viewed Ahimsa as the means and Truth as the end, believing it should be practical and accessible to all who dared to practice it. Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence is deeply rooted in the social and cultural climate of India, where he translated the highest teachings of Indian philosophy into practical life and applied them to political and social contexts. His nonviolent approach has not only inspired world leaders but also served as a political methodology for challenging injustice. Gandhi's methods of political mobilization have left a lasting impact on independence movements and social reforms globally, contributing to the end of British rule in India and influencing civil disobedience movements worldwide.

