

Gandhi's Views On Non Violence

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Abstract: In the present work I have made an attempt to discuss Gandhi's views on Nonviolence. Gandhi considered truth as his life's only ambition and the means to achieve this goal was Nonviolence. In enunciating his principle of Nonviolence. Gandhi was influenced by the teachings of different religious seers. His understanding of Nonviolence is based on a unique philosophy of means and ends wherein he gave importance to both. Gandhi also stipulated a number of conditions in order to practice Nonviolence, which in turn enabled him to attain truth.

Keywords: Meaning of Ahimsa or Nonviolence, Nature of Nonviolence, Difference between the negative and positive meanings of non-violence, Relation between Truth and Non-violence,

Introduction:

According to Gandhi, Ahimsa or Nonviolence is the essence of humanity. So, non-violence is inevitable for existence of society. Law and order can be maintained in human society only in the presence of ahimsa which is the primary root and fruit of peace and love in this empirical world.

Meaning of Ahimsa or Nonviolence :

Ahimsa literally means non-injury and hence non-killing which is translated as non-violence. It has been used in this sense in the Upanishads, Buddhism and Jainism and the orthodox Hindu laws of Manu. But it has been most rigorously interpreted by Jainism which has set the ideal of non-killing or injuring any form of life for any purpose at all. Gandhi adopted the English word non-violence for Sanskrit word 'ahimsa', which he originally used as a moral weapon in his early struggle against social evils. He adopted the word 'non-violence' which means refraining from use of physical force capable of causing injury or death to the opponent. His meaning of the word 'ahimsa' includes non-violence in thought, word and deed. Non-violence is not doing any voluntary injury to person or property. Ahimsa is the central doctrine of Gandhi's life and teaching. For Gandhi, Ahimsa means three things: love (agape), self-suffering (tapasya) and service (seva). Agape, tapasya and seva are three different concepts but all are unified into one and is called Ahimsa by Gandhi.

Non-violence, as understood by Gandhi has two kinds of meaning: Negative non-violence and Positive non-violence. Non-violence is literally negative in meaning, that is, non-killing and non-injury. The negative aspect of non-violence consists in refraining from causing pain or killing life out of anger or from selfish purpose and intention. Thus, non-violence means avoiding injury to anything on earth in thought, word or deed. In its negative sense non-violence does not mean merely non-killing and more insidious form of non-violence, but it also means harsh words, ill will, anger, spite, cruelty, the torture of men and animals, the starvation and exploitation, the wanton humiliation and oppression of the weak and killing of their self-respect, etc.

In its positive sense, non-violence means the biggest love, the greatest charity. A follower of non-violence must love his or her enemy. This active non-violence necessarily includes truth and fearlessness. It is non-violence if one merely loves those that love him but it is non-violence only when one loves those that hate him. To Gandhi, "Ahimsa is not merely a negative state of harmlessness but it is a positive state of love, of doing well even to the evil-doer. One should not help the evil doer in continuing his act of wrong doing, but resisting the wrong doer by dissociating from him even if it offends him or injure him physically."

Nature of Nonviolence:

Gandhi describes the nature of non-violence in the following words:

- (1) "Non-violence is the law of human race and is infinitely greater than and superior to brute force.
- (2) In the last resort it does not avail to these who do not possess a living faith in the God of Love.
- (3) Non-violence affords the fullest protection to one's self-respect and sense of honour, but not always to possession of land or movable property through its habitual practice does not prove a better bulwark than the possession of armed men to defend them. Non-violence, in its very nature of things, is of no assistance in the defense of ill-gotten gains and immoral acts.
- (4) Individuals or nations who would practice non-violence must be prepared to sacrifice their all except honour. It is, therefore, inconsistent with the possession of other people's countries, i.e., modern imperialism, which is frankly based on force for its defiance.
- (5) Non-violence is a power which can be wielded equally by all – children, young men and women or grown-up people, provided they have a living faith in the God of Love and have therefore, equal love for all mankind. When non-violence is accepted as the law of life, it must pervade the whole being and not to be applied to isolated acts.
- (6) It is erroneous to suppose that while the law is good enough for individuals, it is not for the masses of mankind. The practice of non-violence is more than the daily food. Non-violence which is the spiritual food, has to be taken continually."

To Gandhi, non-violence is love without attachment. It is strength without ill-feeling and inaction. It is tolerance without fear and peace without being cowardly. Non-violence is a way of life, devoid of all extremes of passions like anger, enmity, pleasure and pain. All these make up the ideal of ahimsa. Ahimsa (non-violence) is never static but ever changing, embracing all aspects of human life.

Difference between the negative and positive meanings of non-violence:

According to Gandhi, "Ahimsa is not merely a negative state of harmlessness", says Gandhi, "but it is a positive state of love, of doing good even to the evil-doer. But it 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 by disassociating yourself from him, even though it may offend him or injure him physically." Gandhi interprets non-violence in a new perspective. He redefined the

meaning of non-violence. He says that non-violence is not the crude thing it has been made to appear. Not to hurt any living being is no doubt a part of ahimsa. But it is its least expression. The principle of himsa is hurt by every evil thought, by undue haste, by lying, by hatred and by wishing ill to anybody.

Relation between Truth and Non-violence:

Truth and Non-violence are like the two sides of a coin, or rather a smooth unstamped metallic disc. Who can say, which is the obverse, and which the reverse? Ahimsa is the means; Truth is the end. Means to be means must always be within our reach, and so ahimsa is our supreme duty. If we take care of the means, we are bound to reach the end sooner or later. "Non-violence is not the goal, but truth is the goal. The ultimate goal of life to Gandhi is absolute truth which is knowable to man through partial truth. A higher law of duty has required man to seek the final truth fearlessly, actively and selflessly. Non-violence is the superior ethic which enables human beings to live a good life but it is not the goal in itself. "Ahimsa is not the goal" says Gandhi. Truth is the goal. But we have no means of realizing truth in human relationships except through the practice of ahimsa. A steadfast pursuit of ahimsa is inevitably bound to truth – not so violence. That is why I swear by ahimsa. (Harijan, 23.6.1946. p. 199). Gandhi said that truth without non-violence is not truth but untruth.

The surest means to Truth, according to Gandhi, is ahimsa. As a matter of fact, the two are so inextricably bound up together that it is very difficult to disentangle them. Gandhi of course regarded Truth as somewhat superior to ahimsa because he took the former as the end and the latter as merely a means, but, as we know it fully well, 'means' and 'end' were convertible terms for him because he took the two as practically inseparable. He was of the firm faith that a good end, however good it might be, could not be desirable unless it was attained through good means.

A votary of non-violence should not only keep away from causing hurt to the body of an individual, but also offending him by harsh speech and from even thinking ill of him. He should not consider anyone his enemy. If anyone thinks him to be his enemy, he should harbour no ill-will against him." Gandhi said "In non-violence one restrains all impulses. There is non-violence in violence as in the case of using violent methods to restrict the activities of a drunkard. As long as we live the mundane life, we cannot escape violence, but it is possible for us to restrict ourselves. Ahimsa is thus the highest type of renunciation". According to Gandhi non-violence is the extreme limit of forgiveness.

Gandhi said that non-violence is an active force of the highest order. "It is soul-force or the power of Godhead within us." Henceforth, Gandhi, My God, for example, children fearlessly playing with dogs without coming to harm. But if a grown-up person who was afraid of dogs tried to play with one, it would detect fear in the very touch and probably bite him. It is the same with human beings. So fearlessness does not mean that one does not perceive danger; instead, it implies that even when one perceives danger, one is ready to trust in God, because to see the danger clearly and yet to remain unperturbed in the face of it, trusting in God's goodness, is true wisdom.

Gandhi said that non-violence is related with the concept of God also. When we believe in God then again we have faith upon non-violence. So he declared that "Non-violence succeeds only when we have a living faith in God. Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed, they were all warriors of peace in their own style. We have to enrich the heritage left by these world teachers. God has His own wonderful way of executing His plans and choosing His instruments. The prophet and AbuBakr trapped in a cave were saved from their persecutors by

a spider which had woven its web across the mouth of that cave. All the world teachers, you should know, began with a zero. Gandhi believed that Ahimsa is not the crude thing it has been made to appear. Not to hurt any living thing is no doubt a part of Ahimsa. But it is its best expression. The principle of Ahimsa is violated by every evil thought, by undue haste, by lying, by hatred, by wishing ill to anybody. It is also violated by our holding on to what the world needs. But the world needs even what we eat day by day. Realizing the limitations of the flesh, we must strive day by day towards the idea with what strength we have in us. It is perhaps clear from the foregoing, that without Ahimsa it is not possible to seek and find Truth. According to Gandhi it does not mean that we should use force against any person. On the other hand, an attempt should be made to appeal to his heart by undergoing suffering and hardship. The opponent's heart will surely respond sooner or later. The only thing that is required is patience. Gandhi said that "what is a dormant state in non-violence becomes love in the waking state. The world is ruled only by love and the two doctrines 'might is right' and 'the survival of the fittest' are contradictory to the doctrine of love". In Gandhi's view "Ahimsa as regards sub-human life is from the Ashram point of view an important aspect but still only one aspect of this comprehensive principle. Fortunately for humanity non-violence pervades human life and is observed by men without special effort. If we had not bom with one another, mankind would have been destroyed long ago. Ahimsa would thus appear to be the law of life, but we are not thus far entitled, to any credit for observing it".

Conclusion:-

At the present society we are facing trouble in protecting our national integration. We have seen lack of morality, corruptions, intolerance, and terrorism in every field of our national life. Our life is becoming aimless and we are quarreling among each other for power and status forgetting our own duty. In today's context, revisiting Gandhi's teachings is essential to eradicate societal evils through the power of truth and Non violence. Gandhi found that there was injustice everywhere and in every field of life. The future of our society will be grim if we fail to uphold truth and nonviolence.

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