



Revisiting Some Primary Concepts Of Gandhian Philosophy

Satap Halder

Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy,
Jibantala Rokeya Mahavidyalaya, West Bengal, India.

Abstract: The study assesses Gandhi's philosophy, especially focusing on his central concepts of Truth (*Satya*), God, Non-violence (Ahimsa), and Satyagraha. Gandhi did not see religion as a set of rituals or dogmas, but as a path toward the realization of Truth. Influenced by Vedic thought, basically the ideas of *ṛta* (cosmic order) and *satya* (truth), Gandhi equated Truth with the highest reality and ultimately with God. In a significant philosophical shift, he declared "Truth is God" instead of the more conventional "God is Truth," emphasizing the universality and undeniability of Truth. He also rooted his moral and political philosophy in Ahimsa, not merely as non-injury, but as a positive force of love, compassion, and service. These ideas found practical expression in his method of Satyagraha, or non-violent resistance, which was used as a tool for personal growth, social transformation, and political liberation. By examining those key elements, the essay employs how Gandhi's thought offers a comprehensive ethical and spiritual framework that extends beyond sectarian boundaries and continues to inspire global peace movements.

Key Words: Ahimsa, God, Non-violence, Satyagraha, Swaraj, Truth.

Introduction: Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, also known as Bapuji and the Father of the Indian Nation, was not only a political leader but also a profound spiritual thinker. He assumed that a proper understanding of religion was essential for understanding the life. For Gandhi, Truth stood at the heart of all religious and moral endeavors. On the other side, his ethical life was a spiritual journey aimed at realizing absolute Truth through the practice of relative truth in daily life. Gandhi's belief that "Truth is God" marked a significant philosophical stance that extended beyond traditional theism, offering a vision that could be shared by both theists and atheists. Also the core concept of Gandhi like non-violence (Ahimsa) was not only a guiding principle of personal ethics but also a method for social and political change, best demonstrated through his practice of Satyagraha. This research aims to explore Gandhi's notion by interpreting how these ideas were put into practice through non-violence and social service. By doing so, it aims to underline how his philosophy offers not only a spiritual path but also a model for ethical leadership and peaceful social transformation.

A General Study of Gandhi's Thoughts

Looking at today's world, it is worth remembering what Gandhi said about human life and how we should live. His ideas explain how he saw religion, not just as rituals or beliefs, but as a journey to discover the true nature of being human. For Gandhi, life was a journey toward discovering truth. Even his whole life was an experiment with truth, a way of putting his vision of a better life into action. As the scholar M. S. Deshpande rightly said, Gandhi's life was "really a spiritual pilgrimage."¹ Although he lived simply and with few possessions, his thoughts, values, and motivations were deeply profound. Understanding Gandhi is not easy, it requires effort and reflection. From the perspective of social activist, we find that he strongly opposed things like caste-based discrimination and untouchability. He also argued against blind faith and

rigid religious beliefs. Furthermore, Gandhi criticized modern Western civilization and the British parliamentary system. He was more concerned about the moral and spiritual growth of individuals and took a reform-minded approach to all areas of life like social, political, economic, and cultural.

In fact, Gandhi was a visionary. He imagined a society and a whole nation built on the moral values of truth and non-violence. His idea of independent India was something he called *Ramrajya*, a rule based on truth, justice, and peace for everyone.² For this reason, he encouraged the inner spirit of religion; not just outer rituals, but service, devotion, calmness, faith, and moral purity. These values, he asserted, should be part of our daily life, in thought and action. This also explains why he criticized Western civilization and the British style of government. He thought *swaraj* or self-rule was better suited for India. In his view, Western civilization and English education did not help human well-being. Instead, they promoted selfishness, damaged social relationships, and blocked people from realizing their deeper spiritual potential.

Now we focus on his philosophy which is based on three main ideas: Truth, God, and Non-violence. These were the foundation of his beliefs.

Some key questions about his ideas are:

- Why does Gandhi bring Truth in his philosophy?
- Why does he say God is Truth, and later change it to Truth is God?
- What does he think about God?
- How can people find Truth?
- What does he mean by Non-violence, and why is it so important to him?
- Why does he focus so much on Satyagraha (non-violent resistance) to win freedom?

These three ideas i.e. Truth, God, and Non-violence were put into action in his Satyagraha movement during India's freedom fight. They were also the base of his criticism of modern life and government, and part of his dream of *Swaraj* (self-rule) and *Ramrajya* (an ideal society).³

Vedic Understanding of Truth

Gandhi's idea of truth was deeply rooted in Vedic philosophy. The ancient Indian scriptures, particularly the Rig Veda, emphasize the concept of *ṛta* (the natural and moral order of the universe), as central to the idea of ultimate truth. This idea shaped Gandhi's religious and moral worldview. In Vedic thought, *ṛta* is the foundational principle that maintains cosmic harmony and guides ethical human behaviour. It signifies a universal law of order, truth, and justice that must be upheld. Etymologically, the word *ṛta* comes from the root words 'r' or 'ar', which mean 'to put in order.' So, *ṛta* means something that is well-arranged, follows a set pattern, or is truthful and orderly.⁴

Again, in Vedic philosophy, the idea of truth (*satya*) is often mentioned alongside *ṛta*. *Satya* is regarded as one of the highest virtues in Vedic teachings. The Sanskrit word *satya* derives from *sat*, meaning 'being' or 'reality,' and refers to living in alignment with the true nature of the universe.⁵ Truth, therefore, is not just about honesty in speech but about consistency in thought, word, and action. In the Vedas, truth and moral living are inseparable; whereas living truthfully means respecting the cosmic order and avoiding harm or falsehood.

However, the ideas like *ṛta* (the natural order) and *satya* (truth) are important in Vedic philosophy. They are different sides of the same reality. While *Satya* is the highest truth, on the contrary, *ṛta* is how this truth works in the world. Both mostly exist beyond what we see, but we can experience their lower forms in everyday life.⁶ Actually, *Rta* embodies the moral essence of truth. Truth itself is synonymous with righteousness, or dharma. The concepts of *ṛta*, *satya*, and dharma are deeply interconnected. Specifically, *ṛta* represents truth in thought, *satya* reflects truth in speech, and dharma expresses truth in action. These three are equally significant. The Upanishads affirm this by stating, "There is nothing higher than dharma," and "That which is dharma is truth."

Gandhian Understanding of Truth

In his deep search for Truth, Gandhi embraced the Vedic idea that *ṛta* (cosmic order) and *satya* (truth) are one and the same. He saw religion is about living by the moral order of the universe and presumed Truth as the heart of morality. Gandhi's view of Truth was shaped largely by his experience living the Hindu way of life. From childhood, he was inspired to live with honesty and became a devoted follower of Truth.⁷ For

Gandhi, Truth was not just a religious idea but something practical and important in everyday life. It guided everything he thought and did. Truth was more than just speaking honestly; it was the essential reality that makes up everything. He believed Truth should not be dissected or proved by logic alone but accepted with faith.

In the metaphysical sense, Truth is seen as the highest reality - the supreme power, the absolute Truth, eternal and indescribable. It is God, the source of morality, life, and light, and the foundation of all existence. Although it cannot be fully explained in words, it is the ultimate and fundamental Truth. Gandhi understood *satya* as representing this absolute reality behind all appearances.⁸ In the empirical sense, Truth is the relative truth we experience in daily life, such as honesty in our words, thoughts, and actions. Practically, Gandhi defined truth as “what the inner voice within tells us.”⁹

The inner voice that Gandhi spoke of should belong to those who have practiced important virtues like truthfulness, non-violence, celibacy, poverty, and non-possession. There are certain conditions to truly hear this inner voice; a person must recognize their own limits and work hard to develop truthfulness, humility, purity, and non-violence. They must also commit fully to the ideals of poverty and non-possession, practicing them with constant effort (called *Abhyasa*) and detachment from worldly desires (*Vairagya*). Gandhi said, “If you want to swim on the ocean of truth, you must reduce yourself to zero.”¹⁰ His life was an ongoing experiment with truth. He always paid attention to his inner voice, guided by conscience, reason, and teachings from scriptures. His experiments included trying out non-violence, celibacy, and other moral principles. His entire life was dedicated to seeking truth. He conceived that through living by relative truth (the truth we experience in daily life), a person can gradually move closer to absolute truth. This path is very difficult like walking on a razor’s edge, but it is worth pursuing.¹¹ The absolute truth is the ideal goal, and the relative truth acts as a guide along the way.¹² Gandhi claimed to have experienced brief glimpses of absolute truth through moments of relative truth. In practice, relative truth is shown through following Ahimsa (non-violence). He acknowledged that it is impossible for humans to fully attain perfect truth or to give a complete definition of it. He explains that we can only picture God in our imagination. Because our physical body is temporary, we cannot directly see or fully understand eternal Truth face to face. Therefore, in our search for Truth, having faith becomes necessary. This faith is not just blind belief but a lively, fully aware sense of God living within us.

Gandhi Equated Truth with God

Gandhi asserted that Truth, Reality, and God are all the same; they all mean ‘what truly exists’ or ‘being.’ He explained why he identified Truth with God in this way: The word *Satya* (Truth) comes from *Sat*, meaning “being.” According to him, nothing truly exists except Truth. That is why *Sat* or Truth is probably the most important name for God. As a result, it is more accurate to say “Truth is God” rather than “God is Truth.” Though, since people need rulers or leaders, names like ‘King of Kings’ or ‘The Almighty’ will continue to be used for God. But on deeper reflection, we realize that *Sat* or *Satya* is the only truly meaningful and correct name for God. Where there is Truth, there is also true knowledge. Without truth, true knowledge cannot exist. This is why the word *Chit* (Knowledge) is also linked with God. And wherever true knowledge exists, there is always Bliss (*Ananda*), no sorrow. Just as Truth is eternal, the bliss that comes from it is eternal as well. Therefore, God is known as *Sat-Chit-Ananda*; One who embodies Truth, Knowledge, and Bliss.¹³

For this, Gandhi changed the saying from “God is Truth” to “Truth is God.” In the first phrase, Truth is just seen as one quality or attribute of God. But in the second, Truth and God are fully identified as the same. Gandhi considered this change an important insight in his understanding of religion. This shows that his idea of religion goes beyond the idea of a personal God. For Gandhi, God is not the God of any single religion. Instead, God is present everywhere, formless, and is Truth itself, something no one can deny or question. This Truth is the foundation of everything that exists and is the basis for living a moral life. For Gandhi, the word God does not primarily mean a personal being. To him, religion means believing in Truth, not just believing in a personal God. He also had another reason for equating Truth with God that the existence of God might be doubted or rejected by some people. But Truth cannot be doubted. Even an atheist accepts the importance and power of Truth. In fact, an atheist would agree that Truth is the highest reality.¹⁴

For Gandhi, God is a force, the very essence of life - pure consciousness, goodness, truth, light, and love. He saw that even atheists, in their rejection of God, are still seeking Truth. The phrase “Truth is God” respects the perspectives of both believers and non-believers. Ultimately, Truth as the highest reality is beyond

description. Hence, in everyday life, this same reality is expressed through different names and forms. Identifying Truth with God is not only the highest goal of religion and spirituality but also of morality. For Gandhi, Truth is God, not just a quality of God. He agreed with the Advaita Vedanta view that God, the supreme reality, is formless, nameless, without attributes, and an indefinable mysterious power that fills everything.¹⁵ Gandhi wrote, "If human language can describe God fully, then for me, God is Truth. But two years ago, I went further and said, 'Truth is God.' You can see the subtle difference between these two statements: God is Truth, and Truth is God."¹⁶

Non-violence (Ahimsa) through Gandhi's Eyes

Basically in Gandhi's philosophy, Ahimsa (non-violence) is regarded as the core of his moral principle like Truth. For Gandhi, Truth and ahimsa are inseparable, just as religion and morality are deeply connected. Truth cannot be completed without non-violence, and non-violence cannot be completed without Truth. He believed that every action must be guided by truthfulness and grounded in non-violence. To realize Truth, one must be firmly committed to non-violence. In fact, living a moral life shaped by ahimsa is essential for discovering Truth. While explaining non-violence, Gandhi outlined five key principles (axioms) of ahimsa. These are like:

i. Ahimsa requires deep self-purification as much as is humanly possible, that means, a person must cleanse themselves inwardly to truly follow ahimsa; **ii.** The power of non-violence depends not on the will but on the actual capacity to use violence, yet choosing not to; **iii.** Non-violence is always stronger than violence; **iv.** Non-violence never leads to true defeat, in contrast, violence always ends in defeat, no matter the outcome; and **v.** the final result of non-violence is a kind of victory without defeat or pride, a peaceful resolution.¹⁷

Thus, Gandhi maintained that self-purification is necessary to truly practice ahimsa (non-violence). Ahimsa is not just about avoiding harm to others in thoughts, words, or actions; it also means working on yourself from the inside. This includes controlling the ego, which is the root cause of violence. He said that Truth can only be realized through ahimsa, and ahimsa is only possible through self-purification. To purify yourself, you must rise above likes and dislikes, remove selfish desires, and free yourself from fear, pride, and anger. Religion, according to Gandhi, is meant to help purifying the soul and teaching perfect self-control in all areas of life. In our personal decisions, we must let Truth and non-violence to guide our thoughts and actions. To follow non-violence, self-purification must come first. This means being free from harmful emotions in what we think, say, and do; this is what Gandhi called triple purity. Ahimsa is a spiritual weapon; it helps us fight ego, hatred, and ill will. Only by mastering ourselves can we avoid harming others, whether emotionally or physically, and this leads us closer to Truth. For Gandhi, the path to Truth is the same as the path of non-violence. True non-violence is not weakness; it is a powerful force that requires courage and fearlessness. There is no place for cowardice in ahimsa. In a word, non-violence is not just about avoiding harm; it is also about showing love, compassion, and serving others. It means gaining control over one's own greed, anger, and hatred, and working to change the heart and mind from within.

As a matter of fact, the main principle of non-violence is having goodwill toward everyone. In this way, Gandhi emphasized key teachings from the Bhagavad Gita, especially the ideas of *Nishkama* karma yoga (selfless action) and *Stithaprajna* (a person with steady wisdom), and how they apply to everyday life. For Gandhi, non-violence meant self-purification, developing pure, unselfish love and using soul force or truth force instead of physical or violent force. He strongly held that in using inner strength over brute strength, and non-violence over violence, because he had faith in a higher moral law, a law greater than destruction and violence. This higher law, he considered, would lead to a more peaceful, sound, and meaningful life and society. Gandhi was also guided by a deep belief that Truth (or God), the ultimate reality, is the same as the true self within every person. So, human nature and divine nature are essentially one. The idea that all life comes from a single, universal source is what lies at the heart of Gandhi's principle of ahimsa (non-violence).¹⁸

Ahimsa as a Living Practice of Love and Care

In Gandhian thought, love is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world around us and to free people from suffering and oppression. The key, he said, is to love even those who oppress others, just as we love ourselves. For Gandhi, ahimsa (non-violence) means more than not hurting others. It means loving not just our friends, but also those who hate us, even wrongdoers. He saw love as the cure for negative emotions, capable of softening hearts and reducing ego. He affirmed that even wrongdoers could be changed through kind and respectful treatment.¹⁹ This shows his belief that every person, even someone

who does wrong, has the potential for moral goodness in the right environment. Gandhi taught that we should hate the bad actions, not the person. The goal of non-violence is to change the opponent's heart, not to punish or hurt them. This is done through moral persuasion and faith in human goodness. He always respected the dignity of others, even those who opposed him, and aimed to resolve conflict with love and justice. Gandhi never saw anyone as an enemy, everyone deserved love and respect. Ahimsa, for him, meant creating no hatred, no enemies, no divisions, and thus, no conflict or disharmony.

In this way, Gandhi maintained that his religious ideas were best expressed through selfless love and service to others. He wrote, "I cannot practice non-violence (ahimsa) without practicing the religion of service, and I cannot find truth without practicing the religion of non-violence. And there is no religion other than Truth."²⁰ In Gandhi's view, religion and morality are built upon four closely connected principles: truth, ahimsa (non-violence), love, and service. He upheld that Truth can only be discovered through ahimsa, and ahimsa reaches its deepest meaning through love and service to others, especially to those who are weak or in need. For Gandhi, true religion is not about rituals or beliefs; it is about living truthfully, practicing non-violence, and showing compassion through action.

Gandhian Concept of Satyagraha

Gandhi's idea of Satyagraha was a way to put the religious and moral values of truth and non-violence into real-life action. At first, the method was called '*Sadagraha*' which means 'holding firmly to truth' or 'firmness in a good cause.' Though, Gandhi later changed the term to 'Satyagraha' because it better expressed the deeper meaning he wanted to convey. Satyagraha means 'truth-force' or 'soul-force', a kind of strength that comes from truth, non-violence, and love. This concept became the foundation of his non-violent resistance movement.²¹ Gandhi created the word 'Satyagraha' in 1906 during the early part of his work in South Africa to get basic human rights for Indian immigrants. It means truthful persuasion. It uses moral pressure for the sake of truth.

In addition, Satyagraha means being patient, willing to suffer, sacrificing, and loving people. It is like a silent prayer and happily enduring pain to help saving humanity. Gandhi's method is active resistance; not using violence but using love, faith, and sacrifice instead. Love, not hate, is the main idea behind Satyagraha. Satyagraha is based on four main ideas:²²

- a) There is wrong in the world.
- b) Wrong must be stopped.
- c) Violence cannot stop the wrong because it only makes people's evil stronger and will come back worse later.
- d) Wrong can be stopped by patiently accepting suffering with goodwill, even to death. People who do this will live on in spirit, even if they die for the truth.

According to Gandhi, Satyagraha is not just passive resistance or a tool for weak people. It is a spiritual power that requires bravery, patience, and sacrifice. Someone who only thinks about themselves cannot be a *satyagrahi* (a person who follows Satyagraha). It should be done for the good of society, not for personal benefit. Gandhi believed that Satyagraha is a better way than using violence or force. It is not just a theory, but a method that can be used in all parts of life. It is relevant to any society, no matter where or when, because it is based on truth and non-violence. These ideas are the key parts of this method of moral persuasion, which helps people growing spiritually and brings society together.

Swaraj as Envisioned by Gandhi

Gandhi translated his religious ideals into action by extending the principle of non-violence from the individual to the collective level, using it as a powerful tool to achieve *Swaraj*. He firmly entrusted that non-violence is the path of righteousness and truth, while violence and brute force lead to evil and the destruction of life. For Gandhi, *Swaraj* was not about domination or harm, but about enabling individuals to realize their full potential. True independence, therefore, could not be achieved through violence, but only through non-violent means. His vision for India was the realization of *Swaraj*, made possible by embracing the principles of love and service as essential aspects of religion and integrating them into politics. This vision was embodied in his ideal of *Ramrajya*, a sound and moral society. Gandhi applied this philosophy during the political struggle against British rule, seeing it as a journey from falsehood to truth. For him, *Swaraj* meant complete independence (*Poorna Swaraj*). He undertook that genuine freedom could only be experienced when individuals overcame the fear within their hearts and earned their livelihood through

honest, manual work. To achieve this, Gandhi proposed two complementary approaches - constructive economic and social programs to rebuild society from the ground up, and non-violent non-cooperation to resist systems rooted in injustice and falsehood. Gandhi regarded *Swaraj* as indefinable, not limited to any particular form of government or social structure. In his view, *Swaraj* signified true Home Rule, self-rule and self-discipline with deep ethical and spiritual meaning. It was to be attained not by violence, but by the power of the soul, or what he called the 'force of love.' Ultimately, he envisioned *Swaraj* as *Ramrajya*, a state where the sovereignty of the people rests on moral authority, truth, justice, equality, liberty, fraternity, and the establishment of lasting peace for all.²³

Conclusion: In conclusion, we can see that Gandhi's philosophy, centred on truth, non-violence, and selfless service, presents a unique blend of spiritual insight, ethical living, and social activism. His understanding of Truth as God elevates truth from a mere moral virtue to the highest form of divine reality, accessible to all, including non-believers. Rooted in the Vedic understanding of *ṛta*, *satya*, and dharma, Gandhi's worldview is both metaphysical and practical. He insisted that Truth cannot be realized without Ahimsa, and Ahimsa cannot be practiced without self-purification and inner transformation. His principle of non-violence, far from being passive, was a powerful tool of love, courage, and service, capable of challenging injustice and transforming society. Through Satyagraha, Gandhi provided a method to live out these principles in public life. More than a political tactic, Satyagraha was the embodiment of spiritual resistance, the force of Truth and non-violence in action. In a world often divided by violence, hatred, and ego, Gandhi's legacy invites us to re-imagine a life where the beliefs of moral and the spiritual guide our personal and collective destinies. His life was, as he called it, "an experiment with truth," and it remains a profound guide for those who seek justice through peace, and divinity through selfless love.

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