



# The Unique Weapon Of Social Change: Exploring The Idea Of M.K. Gandhi's Satyagraha

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## Abstract:

Mahandas Karamchand Gandhi is recognised as the father of Indian nation. He is known for the champion of non-violent movement across the globe. He spread the idea of Ahimsa (Non-violence) through his unique style of movements for civil and political rights. Therefore, he is often considered as the founder of the non-violent movement. Gandhi shares his experience about the application of Ahimsa in the Indian freedom struggle in his autobiography. He led a successful decade long non-violent movement against the imperial foreign rule in India. Gandhi's idea about the application of Ahimsa as a unique weapon inspired many revolutionary leaders and impressed many statesmen of the world. In the contemporary world, it has been observed that the idea of non-violence propounded by Gandhi, still found to be the legacy among social movement activists and they apply non-violent techniques to achieve the goals of their movements. In this study an attempt has been made to explore the relevance of Gandhian techniques of movement in the contemporary society. The study also tries to find out the inner outlook of Gandhian non-violence among the present-day movement activists and its validity of practical use.

**Key Notes:** Ahimsha, Satyagraha, Ramrajya, Nonviolent, Hijrat, Fasting, Dharna etc.

## I. Introduction

Gandhi did not claim himself as a socio-political thinker, but his extra ordinary and amazing thinking on the certain issues of human life makes him the real philosopher of life. He was a great thinker as he challenged most of the beliefs and assumption of his time and provided possible alternatives, for instances, Satyagraha, Ahimsa, Ramrajya, Trusteeship, and the like. It is difficult to placed Gandhi's idea in already established ideologies. We find Gandhi as a liberal among the Marxian, a Marxian among the liberal and a democrat among socialists and a socialist among democrats. He synthesized the idea of nonviolence with his every thought. His life and thought were guided by two principles, i.e., truth and nonviolence. He relates truth with God. According to him searching God means searching the truth. Therefore, his philosophy is found to be based on truth and nonviolence.

He believes himself as a social revolutionist. The idea of Ahimsa was not invented or coined by Gandhi. The idea already occupied important place in religious thought of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. In those religions philosophies nonviolent is found to be indispensable tenants. Ahimsa is a Sanskrit term, which means "not to injure". Those religious beliefs that all living beings have the spark of the divine spiritual energy. Therefore, to hurt another one is to hurt oneself. So, the teaching of those religions never encourages to strike against somebody. Though Gandhi was a religious man, but he thought differently and applied nonviolent strike as a tool to resist unjust laws in various occasions, which made him different from the ancient religious teachers. He conducted inner self experience at any point of time.

Gandhi was influenced by the ideas of Leo Tolstoy. Both Tolstoy and Gandhi were recognized as idealists. But the difference between the two is that M. K. Gandhi applied nonviolence in his way of life and his campaign for struggle against injustice. Therefore, he is recognized as the champion of non-violent movement. He is often considered as the founder of the non-violent movement. He spread the concept of non-violence (Ahimsa) through his movements for civil rights. He also spread his experience of non-violent movement through his valuable writings. He led a successful decade long non-violent movement against the British rule in India to achieve justice and freedom for the Indians. His idea of protest inspired many revolutionary leaders and impressed many statesmen of the world. The idea propounded by Gandhi is established as Gandhism and the follower of Gandhi's philosophy is called Gandian.

In contemporary world, it has been observed that the idea of non-violence developed by Gandhi, still alive among movement activists and they have been applying Gandhian non-violent techniques to achieve the goals of their movements. In this paper an attempt has been done to study the relevance of Gandhian non-violent techniques of protest among the movement activists in the contemporary world. In the study an attempt has also been made to find out the inner outlook of Gandhian non-violence technique among the present-day movement activists and its validity of practical use.

## **II. Objective of the study**

The main objective of the present study is to understand the unique methods of protest for social change applied by M.K. Gandhi, and to explore whether idea of non-violence still really alive among the activists who lead social movement.

## **III. Methodology**

The paper has been prepared based on the data collected from secondary sources like, books, journal, magazine, print and electronic medias. The analysis of the study is also based on the data collected from primary sources like, intellectual views and not participatory self-observation of the author.

Descriptive and analytical approach has been used in discussion.

## **IV. Discussion and Findings**

### **IV.I Non-violence**

The idea of nonviolence has been derived from the ancient Indian religious principles. In ancient religious texts and teachings, it is found that hurting people, other living and non-living being unnecessary to achieve one's pleasure is violence and sin. Therefore, they teach to be abstained from violence. Gandhi made personal practice of being harmless to self and others under every condition. He applied this principle to bring about social and political change in the society.

## IV.II Satyagraha

Gandhi's concept of Satyagraha relates to the notion of truth. The meaning Satyagraha is search for truth. Gandhi defines Satyagraha as holding on to the truth, hence truth is force. He calls it love force or soul force. To him, resisting non-violently, without feeling fear, is considered the submit of bravery, and resisting violently by the activist is considered as cowardice and fearing. Satyagraha means nonviolence and Satyagrahi means nonviolent activist. Gandhi's Satyagrahi was a volunteer bound by following principles:

- a. Willingness to sacrifice his life for truth, even it destined losing to something that is pure evil.
- b. Harbour no anger but suffer the anger of the opponent.
- c. Do not submit to any order given in anger, even though sever punishment is threaten for disobeying.
- d. Refrain from insult and swearing.
- e. Protect opponents from insult or attack, even at the risk of life.
- f. Do not resist arrest.
- g. If taken to prison, behave in a good manner.
- h. Refuse to surrender from his stand.
- i. Obey the order of truth leader.

## IV.III Methods of Nonviolence Movement

M.K. Gandhi instituted such nonviolent methods throughout his movement for civil rights and Indian freedom movement, which established a new milestone in the history of human struggle. He used diverse methods in his campaign for social and political change. Though Gandhi was not the first activist who used such nonviolent techniques, but here unique thing was that he strictly added the norms of morality and truth in every technique of the movements. Techniques of Nonviolent movement instituted by Gandhi are as follows.

### a. Negotiation and arbitration

This form of act is associated with humble appeal to the authority through negotiation, submission of memorandum and demonstrating a possible solution. This is the polite and intelligent method of achieving the goal for the peace of the deprived people. On the table of negotiations with the opponents, the activists are supposed to prove the truthful injustice done by the opponents and to demonstrate the truth and possible solution.

### b. Nonviolence Direct Action

This technique is used when the negotiation and arbitration method get failed. The aim of direct action used by the activists is to obstruct authority from performing some practices to which they object. In that technique, the activists use their nonviolent force to achieve certain goals directly. The forms of nonviolent direct actions are as follows.

#### i. Protest

Protest is a symbolic action performed by the nonviolent activists to show their united support and disapproval of something. The goal of this action is to bring public awareness to the issue, to influence a group of people, to facilitate future nonviolent action. The protest message is directed towards the

opponent and the people affected by the issue. Peaceful procession and public assemblies are such instances of protest.

## **ii. Non cooperation**

It is one of the greatest techniques of Satyagraha in which the activist denies his cooperation to the opponent. It is the technique of protesting against the evildoer. In this protest the activist must maintain good relationship with his opponents following the principle “hate the sin not the sinner”. It is therefore, one of the weapons of nonviolent activist to force the unjust and immoral power to rectify the mistakes of the opponent.

## **ii. Civil Disobedience**

It is an active nonviolent method. When the method is employed by the activists, they refuse to obey certain laws, orders or commands and demands of the authority. It is also associated with peaceful protest in against the unjust law and order of the Government. The activists who disobey the law that conscience tells them is unjust and willingly accepts the penalty by staying in jail to arouse the conscience of the community on the injustice of the law is at that moment by expressing the very highest respect for the law. Although the method had been practiced long before Gandhi but the dew of nonviolent was absent in that movement. But Gandhi attached it with truly nonviolent acts and applied it in Indian freedom movement.

## **iii. Fasting**

It is one of the greatest techniques of Satyagraha and the greatest sacrifice of activists for the well-being to others. Through this act the activists attach their greatest devotion to duty and love for opponent. By this act the activist purifies his body and soul which influence the opponent's psychology to change the mind. Prior to resort this technique the activist should be very sure that his stand is genuine and for the sake of the good to others.

## **iv. Strike**

It is another great technique of Satyagraha. Strike means a work stoppage caused by the mass refusal of employees to work. It takes place in response to employee's grievances. By using this technique, the activist exerts fear in the mind of opponent and gen fulfilled their demands.

## **v. Economic Boycott**

It is the action of making economic independent. It is associated with nationalism and self-rule. The action is involved with boycotting foreign products and revival of domestic products and production process. The action is aimed at removing foreign rule from power and improving national economic condition.

## **vi. Hijrat**

This is the ultimate technique of the Gandhian nonviolent movement. If all the techniques get failed, then the activist should ready to leave the world of injustice ruled by the dictator. Hijrat is a protest that directed against the dictator in order to expel the activist out of the nation.

## V. Relevance

Gandhi was successful in spreading peace and nonviolence throughout the world. His struggle was always directed towards the truth and justice, and never for any sort of revenge. Therefore, he could attract the people around the world and could establish his thought as legacy. Many significant activists around the world have been inspired by his ethos of peace and nonviolence.

### 1. Martine Luther King Junior

He was born on 15 January 1929 and assassinated on 4<sup>th</sup> April 1968. He was a Baptist minister and social activist who fought against the segregation law in the US. He was influenced and inspired by the ideas and acts of Gandhi. He led the US civil right movement from 1950s until his assassination in 4<sup>th</sup> April 1968. During that civil rights movement he applied Gandhian techniques of nonviolence.

### 2. Nelson Mandela

He was born on 18<sup>th</sup> July 1918 and 5<sup>th</sup> December 2013. He was a South African anti-apartheid revolutionary, politician and philanthropist. Ideologically he was nationalist and Marxist. He was also influenced by Gandhian idea of nonviolence. He fought against apartheid in South Africa for bringing equal rights. In 26 years of his age he joined in African National Congress (ANC) and tried to achieve equal citizenship for every South African irrespective of Black and White. Initially he employed Gandhian techniques of nonviolent movement like nonviolent protest, boycott, strikes, civil disobedience etc. But after 10 years of his struggle, he changed his mind and started to fight to achieve the goal through nonviolent method. He became the leaders of militant outfit Arm wing of ANC. He himself admitted that he was forced to use violence since all the other ways of nonviolence had failed. His action brought him to jail for almost three decades. In the jail he realized his untruth deed and motivated his fellow prisoners to find better treatment and use nonviolent resistance. After the release from jail, he could succeed to achieve equal political rights irrespective of race. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993.

### 3. Aung San Suu Kyi

She was born on 19<sup>th</sup> June 1945. She is the follower of Gandhian thought and the champion of democracy in Myanmar. Before coming of her in the movement of Myanmar against the authoritarian and one party ruled state, the people of Myanmar were unknown to the real value and meaning of the democracy. The protest movement was already started from thirty years ago, but when she became part of the movement the call for democracy became stronger and clear. Under her leadership thousands of people participated in the nonviolent protest movement across the country. The state soldiers used brute force against pro-democracy demonstration in 1988. Thousands of people were killed, arrested and many were fled to the neighbouring countries. Even Ang San Suu Kyi was made home arrest, but she never called her followers to adopt violent means to achieve the goal of the movement. But that nonviolent movement could change the mindset of the military government. The Government made certain changes in the system which was claimed as military style democracy. She was awarded Nobel Peace Prize in 1988. In 1989 Ang San Suu Kyi formed a political party under the name, National League for democracy (NLD). Finally, in 2008 the state adopted new democratic constitution and on later period made certain changes to make more popular democracy. In the election 2015 NLD won the election and formed the Government. Thus, the democracy was established in Myanmar.



#### 4. HH Dalai Lama

He was born on 6<sup>th</sup> July 1935 and still alive. Dalai Lamas are important monks of the Gelung school, the new school of Buddhism in Tibet. The 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama is the current Dali Lama, who is popularly known as HH Dali Lama. His real name is Lhamo Thondup. He is one of the followers of Gandhi in present time. During the 1959 Tibetan uprising he left the country and took asylum in India. The Time magazine named him one of the children of Gandhi. He won Nobel Peace Prize in 1989. He has travelled the world and spoken about the peace and nonviolent of the Tibetan people.

#### 5. John Lennon

He was born on 9<sup>th</sup> October 1940. He was an English singer and peace activist. He tried to spread peace and nonviolent through his music and lyrics. In several times and occasion, he criticised the act of violence by the states. He criticised the Vietnam war on the land of US for what he was to leave the US. He was assassinated on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1980.

#### 6. Ho Chi Minh

He was born on 19<sup>th</sup> May 1890 and died on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 69. He was a Vietnamese revolutionary and the former Prime Minister of Vietnam. He was the key founder of the democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1945. In an interview in 1955 by the reporter of the Hindu, he said that he honoured the great spiritual leader M.K. Gandhi as his master in his struggle against imperialism in Asia. He admitted that he did not want to pick up the gun, but he was forced to fight for injustice and untruth.

#### 7. Cesar Chavez

He was born on 31<sup>st</sup> March 1927 and died at the age of 66 on 24<sup>th</sup> April 1993. He was a Latin American civil right activist. His popular saying "Once social change begins, it cannot be reversed. You cannot uneducated the person who has learned to read. You cannot humiliate the person who feels pride. You cannot oppress the people who are not afraid anymore. We have seen the future and future is ours." that reflect the spark of Gandhi's idea of truth. He fought for the rights of the agriculture worker who had been exploited by the employers through organizing them into National Farmer Workers' Association and launched a nonviolent movement. He launched marches, strikes and boycotts to achieve the rights of the poor people which is responsible for legislation enacting the first bill of Rights for agricultural workers.

Thus, from the above illustration it is found that still the Gandhian thought is surviving in the minds of today's human generation and has become the great legacy in the human desire. Still the truth is fighting to defeat the untruth and injustice to establish a nonviolent and peaceful world.

Apart from the above instances we can also found many Gandian activists in India who have been struggling for the rights and justice of human and environment. Now Gandhi's nonviolent resistance to untruth and injustice, which included a variety of techniques of individual and mass protest has become the legacy among the activist of present Indian society. But in the study, it is observed that the moral quality is absent among today's protestors and their leaders.

## VI. Conclusion

In the conclusion we may say that Gandhian unique weapon, non-violence as a tool of protest for social and revolutionary changes in the contemporary world still alive in today's busy and complex world. Like Gandhi many followers of him like, Martin Luther King Junior and John Lennon sacrificed their lives for the sake of truth and the peace to the others. The present study reveals that the transformation of evil society to just society is possible only through the ways of non-violent because being just itself needs to be inner purified. Gandhi gave an independent nation to the Indians. He spread satyagraha, arguably the most revolutionary idea of a long and ravaged century. He believed that political change could be affected by renouncing violence. Therefore, application of soul-force as much as armed force, could bring down an unjust rule. His greatest achievement lay in his legacy to the world. His unique idea of Satyagraha inspires the people of all nations to take up the peaceful struggle for freedom from oppression.

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