



Satyagraha and Mahatma Gandhi: A Brief Idea

Manjari Verma ¹ and Ram Prawesh Azad²

Department of Political Science,

¹L. S. College, Muzaffarpur

²B. P. S. College, Desari (Vaishali)

Satyagraha has often been translated as "holding fast to truth". Gandhi began practising some form of Satyagraha in South Africa. Later he began to propound its conceptual and theoretical foundations. To be a Satyagrahi one has to practice the principles of nonviolence (ahimsa). Gandhi never violated the basic principle in his whole life. When the people in non-cooperation movement turned violent, he withdrew the political movement. For practicing it, one has to observe; restrain in one's actions. Practising non-violence does not show any weakness but only strength. All these concepts analysed above are a part of the Indian traditions but Gandhi brought them to a higher level by providing universal meanings. Satyagrah is based on the principle of 'purity of ends and means.' Gandhiji said Satyagraha is nothing but Tapasya for truth and justice. It is a weapon based on truth non-violence and self suffering to fight against injustice. It is the weapon of the non-violent struggle.

Satyagrah is a term comprising two words; satya or truth, and agrah or insistence. Hence, in its loose English interpretation, satyagrah means insistence on truth. In practice, however, satyagrah transpired into nonviolent resistance, passive resistance or civil resistance as a form of mass protest against the State. Gandhiji sometimes also referred to it as truth force or soul force. The practice was so successful in the Indian independence movement that Martin Luther King Jr. emulated it for the American Civil Rights Movement, and so did Nelson Mandela to protest against South African apartheid.

However, as the notion of satyagrah and its practice advanced, it started getting increasingly decoupled from its equation with passive resistance. A stage came when they no more remained synonyms. Gandhiji himself drew clear distinction between the two terms in his book Satyagrah in South Africa in 1928:

Truth (satya) implies love, and firmness (agraha) engenders and therefore serves as a synonym for force. I thus began to call the Indian movement Satyagraha, that is to say, the Force which is born of Truth and Love or nonviolence, and gave up the use of the phrase "passive resistance", in connection with it, so much so that even in English writing we often avoided it and used instead the word "satyagraha" itself or some other equivalent English phrase.

According to Gandhiji, there was scope for inclusion of violence in the methodology of passive resistance, no matter how remote. Secondly, passivity may also come to imply being weak, being unable to steadfastly and resolutely resist the might of the oppressor. Hence, it may connote a helpless or even escapist measure by the weak who are unable to fight the strong with the weapon of non violent resistance. satyagrah's ethos was quite the opposite. It perceived nonviolence as a force greater than violence, and

hence capable of fighting it effectively, and ultimately unarming it. Patient suffering was its driving force; one lets the oppressors use as much force and oppression as they can on the nonviolent protestors, until a stage came when they can incur no more violence or oppression. Their capacity to be violent would exhaust, but the capacity of the protestors to endure it non-violently would not. Such valiant endurance and resistance, by no means, amounts to cowardice.

Another important distinction Gandhiji drew between passive resistance and satyagrah was that while the former did not insist on unequivocal adherence to truth under any and all circumstances, and at any and all cost, satyagrah did include truth as a faith induced, nonnegotiable instrument in its ideological constitution.

Gandhiji said conclusively on the matter, which is recorded in the Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, "Satyagrah is the weapon of the strong, it admits of no violence under any circumstances whatsoever, and it ever insists upon truth. I think I have made the distinction perfectly clear [between satyagrah and passive resistance]".

Satyagrah is unique in its conception as opposed to other resistance movements which strive to prove wrong or to defeat the opponent. On the other hand, if situation so demands, satyagrah even goes to the extent of cooperating with the opponents to meet the end objective. Its foundation is empathy and compassion. Gandhiji expressed this aspect eloquently in his writing in Harijan, dated March 25, 1939; "The satyagrahi's object is to convert, not to coerce the wrongdoer".

Although satyagrah and passive resistance are still perceived as one and the same by certain quarters, the above deliberation dispels the misunderstanding.

Steps of Satyagraha

Satyagraha have three steps:

1. Persuading the opponents through reasoning and being open.
2. Appealing to the opponents through the self-suffering of satyagrahis. It is an appeal to Man's person.
3. Non co-operation and civil disobedience.

Techniques of Satyagraha

- 1) Non-co-operation such as hartal, boycott
- 2) Civil-disobedience such as non-payment of taxes, defence of specific laws.
- 3) Fasting prayers, pledges
- 4) Hijrat – Peacefully stoppage of work
- 5) Strike
- 6) Peaceful picketing
- 7) Peace brigade - a type of non-violent army.
- 8) Boycotts
- 9) Processions

Gandhiji used all these methods of satyagraha against the British rule. He believed that the British rule depended on the cooperation of the people of India. The British rule will not last even for a single day, if people become fearless and refuse to cooperate with the (unjust) and the tyrannical British Government.

The non-cooperation movement of 1921 failed to achieve the goal of Swaraj within one year. But it made some contribution to the Indian national Movement.

The Civil Disobedience Movement was launched by Gandhiji on 6th April 1930 by breaking the Salt Act at Dandi. The Civil disobedience movement was a total success and had paralysed the British

Government In 1942, the Quit India Movement started and Gandhi gave the battle cry of do or die. It created an intense and widespread anti-British feeling in India.

Conditions of Satyagraha

It is a birth-right of a person. But requires following:

- 1) Self-suffering - In this satyagrahi make direct appeal to the soul of oppressor and bring moral pressure on the opponents. Hence, capacity to bear is necessary.
- 2) Unshakable faith in God
- 3) Fearlessness - Free from passions, emotions and fear
- 4) Patience and determination
- 5) It is 'love process and appeal to the heart
- 6) Satyagrahi must not hanker after wealth and fame.
- 7) Inner purity
- 8) Causes of satyagraha should be legitimate and just.
- 9) For the success of satyagraha it is essential to mobilise the force of public opinion.
- 10) Forgiveness.
- 11) Careful study of situation
- 12) No secrecy.

Thus Gandhi was inventor of the new weapon of Satyagraha which is based on Non-violence. Actually the use of the weapon of non-violence is not new. It was used by Mira, Christ, Socrates. But its scope was limited to individual. Gandhiji expanded its sphere and applied it to political and social actions. Satyagraha is used all over the world.

Now it is a technique of revolution and fighting. It is a weapon of resistance which is based on non-violence.

Assumptions of Satyagraha

- 1) Truth abides
- 2) Human being is good evilness in man is temporary
- 3) Can be use by all, in all circumstances. Application is universal
- 4) Should be used as last resort.
- 5) Life is one and integrated Unity of life.
- 6) Not coercion or blackmail It did not threaten other.
- 7) Belief in natural rights of man

Thus resistance on moral grounds is one of the greatest contributions of Gandhi to political thought. Today it has become an instrument of struggle for fundamental change.

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