

**Ethics and Values**  
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**Lecture – 5**  
**Gandhi's Philosophy on Non-Violence**

Hello everyone! Welcome to the lecture on ethics and values. In the previous lecture we discussed some of thoughts put forward by Gandhi on truth. In this lecture we will understand his thoughts on non-violence but before getting into it, let me ask you a simple question from the previous lecture. The term Sarvodaya depicts which form of Truth? Is it absolute truth or relative truth? Think and try to remember the answer. According to Gandhi, Sarvodaya is a partial expression of absolute truth at the social level. Therefore, it is a relative truth.

Now, let's move on to the next topic which is non-violence. I cannot simply say non-violence; actually it is Gandhi's understanding on non-violence. So through this lecture we will try to find out Gandhi's meaning of Ahimsa or non-violence. As you all know, Gandhi's emergence as a leader was a turning point in the development of nonviolent struggle. He first led the struggle against racial discrimination in South Africa and then he led the struggle for Indian independence. I must say that Gandhi was the first to systematically combine a variety of tactics into a strategic plan in a campaign of non-violent action. He can also be considered as the first to conduct a series of campaigns toward long term goals. Personally speaking,

I as a sociologist consider him as a social scientist who was deeply religious, practical, and experimental in temperament. He was not only a political strategist but also a social visionary. Gandhi's non-violence had three main elements:

- 1) Self-improvement (the effort to make oneself a better person),
- 2) "Constructive programme" (concrete work to create the new social order aimed at),
- 3) Campaigns of resistance against social evils that blocked the way forward, such as the caste system and British colonial exploitation.

Non-violent action is not simply any method of action which is not violent. Broadly speaking, it means taking action that goes beyond normal institutionalised political methods like voting, lobbying, letter writing, verbal expression, without injuring opponents. We can say, on the most fundamental level, it is a means by which people discover their social power. One thing we have to understand is that Non-violence is not the same thing as pacifism. Pacifism can be defined in many words. Pacifism is a state of mind. It is passive whereas non-violence is active. Pacifism is harmless and therefore easier to accept than non-violence, which is dangerous and requires lot of courage. At the core, non-violence depicts a strong adherence towards persuasion that does not use physical force and does not cause suffering. Gandhi invented a word for it: Satyagraha, from satya, meaning truth, broadly meaning as "holding onto truth."

Now, let's have a short reflection spot. From the following identify the form of non-violent action as proposed by Gandhi.

- a) Forced segregation
- b) Forced displacement
- c) Sit ins
- d) Corporal punishment

I am sure you might have identified the answer which is option c non-cooperation.

Non-violent action takes three main forms:

- 1) Protest and persuasion
- 2) Non-cooperation
- 3) Intervention

The first category, i.e protests and persuasion includes activities such as speech-making, picketing, petitions, vigils, street theatre, marches, rallies, and sit-ins. Now, when they are practised under conditions of governmental tolerance, then these methods can be comparatively insignificant; but when the views expressed are unpopular or controversial, or go against government policy, even the mildest of them may require great courage and can have a powerful impact. The second category is non-cooperation which involves active non-cooperation. In the face of institutional injustice and discrimination, people may refuse to act in ways which are considered “normal”- to work, buy, or obey. This largest category of non-violent action can take up different forms like refusal to pay taxes, withholding rent or utility payments, civil disobedience, draft resistance, fasting, and more than fifty different kinds of boycotts and strikes. As you know, Non-cooperation can effectively stop the normal functioning of society.

Finally, there is non-violent intervention, which can be defined as the active inclusion and unsettling presence of people in the natural processes of social institutions. This can include sit-ins, occupations, obstructions of everyday business in offices, the streets, or elsewhere, and creation of new social and economic institutions, including the establishment of parallel governments which compete with the old order for sovereignty. These methods tend to pose a more direct and instantaneous challenge than the other methods described earlier and to bring either a faster success or sharper repression.

One thing we have to understand here that the elements of Gandhi’s philosophy find their roots in the Indian religions of Jainism and Buddhism. For Gandhi, ahimsa or non-violence formed the expression of the deepest love for all humans, including one’s opponents; this non-violence therefore included not only a lack of physical harm to them, but also a lack of hatred or ill-will towards them.

Gandhi rejected the traditional dichotomy between one’s own side and the “enemy;” so he believed in persuading opponents of their injustice and prejudice, by not punishing them, but by winning their friendship. Gandhi was also a firm believer of the thought that if violence was used to achieve any end – even if it was employed in the name of justice- the result would be more violence. Therefore, he discarded the idea of a just war. I have already

introduced the word Satyagraha in my lecture. According to writers it was Gandhi's main tactic in his fight against the British. The meaning of Satyagraha is "Soul-Force" or "The power of truth". Gandhi developed Satyagraha as the practical extension of ahimsa and love. Satyagraha later took the form of civil disobedience and non-cooperation against injustice. Civil disobedience involved breaking a specific law if it was believed to be unfair, and then facing the consequences. The Civil disobedience movement was a vital part of Indian freedom struggle led by Mahatma Gandhi. The movement began with the Salt March which was led by Gandhi on 12th March 1930 from Sabarmati Ashram to Dandi in Gujarat. After reaching Dandi, Gandhi and his followers violated the salt laws by making salt from the salted sea water. After this, breaking the British laws became the widespread phenomena in India.

The Champaran rebellion in Bihar was the first active involvement of Gandhi in the Indian freedom struggle. The British forced the farmers to grow indigo and other cash crops on their fertile land, and then sell these crops to them at a much cheaper price. The situation became more gruesome for the farmers due to harsh weather conditions and levy of heavy taxes pushing them towards abject poverty. Having heard of the situation of farmers at Champaran, Gandhi immediately paid a visit and adopted the approach of civil disobedience movement and launched demonstrations and strikes against the landlords bringing them down on their very knees. As a result, they signed an agreement in which they granted control and compensations to the farmers, and cancelled the hikes in revenue and collection.

The other element of Satyagraha is non-cooperation with the evil which consisted of pulling out all support for an unjust system, such as the British rule of India. This tactic need not break any law, but might include boycotting British products, refusing to work for British employers, pulling one's children out of British schools, refusing to supply the British with services, and not paying taxes. Non-cooperation movement in 1920 was caused by the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. Gandhi organised a nation-wide Satyagraha which used such non-cooperation techniques, as well as public demonstrations, in order to "withdraw Indian support from the vast, unjust hegemony of the Empire which was brought to an end". So friends, I hope you might have understood Gandhi's views on truth and non-violence and how relevant it was during the times of freedom struggle. But let me ask you something, do you think these ideologies on truth and non-violence still stand as relevant? What is the significance of Gandhi in the modern world?

Many important leaders who fought for human rights in South Africa adopted his teachings and we have names from Martin Luther King to Nelson Mandela, Dalai Lama to Aung San Suu Kyi. The former US President, Barack Obama, sees Mahatma Gandhi as an inspiration. He once commented that for him, Gandhi is an embodiment of transformational change that can be made when ordinary people coming together to do extraordinary things. Similarly we can find many world leaders inspired from Gandhi's thoughts.

In India and across the world we still see peaceful protests in the form of candle march, demonstrations, sit ins and hunger strikes. Gandhi's view about sanitation is seen today in Government of India's Swachh Bharat Mission. We can even look at the initiative Make in

India as a manifestation of Gandhi's ideals of self-sufficiency. Gandhi's philosophy of inclusive growth is fundamental to the building of a resurgent rural India. I leave the rest of the examples for you people to identify.

Let me end this lecture by quoting Gandhi "I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary, the evil it does is permanent." So, being violent, taking revenge, protesting with guns and arms might solve the problem temporarily, make someone feel happy and satisfied, it might even shut mouths, but the result it causes is harmful and dangerous. And the happiness is just momentary.

In the next lecture, we will come across the debate of social and self-interest.

Thank you and have a nice day.