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Abstract: Although Mahatma Gandhi is known as the apostle of non-violence (*ahimsa*), he never wrote a treatise on non-violence. By nature he was a practitioner rather than a theoretician. He humbly admitted that he did not have a final word on it. In fact, he claimed that non-violence was indefinable, that it was impossible to have a complete theoretical knowledge of non-violence. It can only be understood through experience: we can merely catch glimpses of it as it unfolds in our life and actions. He was constantly experimenting, and his thought was continually evolving. Hence we have to sift through both his life and writings to get some idea of his understanding of nonviolence.

Keywords: Ahimsa, Gandhi, Non-violence, Indian freedom struggle

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The Non-Violence of Mahatma Gandhi

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Although Mahatma Gandhi is known as the apostle of non-violence (*ahiṁsā*), he never wrote a treatise on non-violence. By nature he was a practitioner rather than a theoretician (Gandhi 1958-1988: *Collected Works*: 62: 224-225; henceforth as CW). He humbly admitted that he did not have a final word on it (CW 64: 225). In fact, he claimed that non-violence was indefinable, that it was impossible to have a complete theoretical knowledge of non-violence. It can only be understood through experience: we can merely catch glimpses of it as it unfolds in our life and actions (CW 71: 294). He was constantly experimenting, and his thought was continually evolving (CW 56: 128). Hence we have to sift through both his life and writings to get some idea of his understanding of non-violence.

This article has three major divisions. The first part is expository, presenting Gandhiji's concept of non-violence in its varied hues and colours. In the second part, I give a critical appreciation of his understanding of non-violence. The final part includes reflections on non-violence and its contemporary relevance.

I. Gandhiji's Understanding of Non-Violence

1. *The Nature and Characteristics of Non-violence*

The Sanskrit word *ahiṁsā*, which is normally translated as 'non-violence', literally means 'non-injury', 'non-killing'. It is made up of the negative prefix *a* and the noun *hiṁsā* (injury, harm, killing, destruction), derived from the verb *hiṁs* (to strike, hurt, injure, kill, destroy), which, in turn, is probably an abbreviated desiderative of the verb *han* (to kill, destroy, injure, strike down, conquer) (Whitney 1885: 205). In Indian tradition, although *ahiṁsā* is a negative term, indicating what one should not do (not injuring), it has a positive meaning too because it also involves positive acts of kindness, compassion, affection and love towards others. Moreover, it includes not only physical or bodily non-violence, but also vocal and mental non-violence (Tähtinen 1976: 56-59, 65-69).

For Gandhiji too, non-violence is not merely abstaining from physical injury or killing. "Non-violence means not harming anyone in thought, word or action out of ill will or selfishness"

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(CW 34: 437). For him, non-violence was not merely negative; it was eminently positive. "It is a positive state of love, of doing good even to the evil-doer" (Chander 1945: 412). "We should learn to condemn evil but, at the same time, love the evil-doer" (CW 20: 381). "Ahimsa means 'love' in the Pauline sense, and yet something more....Ahimsa includes the whole creation, and not only human. Besides, love in the English language has other connotations too, and so I was compelled to use the negative word. But it does not, as I have told you, express a negative force, but a force superior to all the forces put together" (CW 62: 200). He also refers to this 'love-force' as 'truth-force' (CW15: 249) and 'soul-force', as opposed to 'brute-force' (CW 14: 379). On one occasion he proclaimed, "No other English term can express all the meanings of *ahimsa* which the word *innocence* expresses" (CW 18: 265). Backianadan conjectures that Gandhiji chose this word 'innocence' "since, positively it seems to connote pure love, simplicity, purity of intention, trust in others' good will; negatively an absence of hatred, duplicity and intent to hurt and destroy others" (1991: 79).

Thus, Gandhiji's non-violence went beyond Tolstoy's passive resistance. It is an active force of love (CW 48: 407). In fact, it is all-comprehensive:

> *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 least expression. The principle of *Ahimsa* is hurt by every evil thought, by undue haste, by lying, by hatred, by wishing ill to anybody. It is also violated by one's holding on to what the world needs" (Chander 1945: 404).

> *Ahimsa* really means that you may not offend anybody, you may not harbour an uncharitable thought even in connection with one who may consider himself to be your enemy....For one who follows the doctrine of *Ahimsa* there is no room for an enemy; he denies the existence of an enemy (Chander 1945: 405).

In dealing with one's opponent great care has to be taken to avoid violence of any sort. The antagonist is to be won over through gentle persuasion, not violence, and one's own non-violence also prompts one to constantly re-examine one's position and, if necessary, revise one's opinion, for it is possible that it may be false (Bondurant 1959: 33). While minimizing the disputant's error, one should magnify one's own error (CW 47: 244). One ought to refrain from giving unfavourable or unwarranted interpretations even to the motives of the opponent (CW 35: 104). One should seek an honourable solution, without harbouring anger against the adversary; in fact, one should be ready to suffer the anger of the opponent, not returning tit for tat. One must even go to the extent of protecting the antagonist from insult and injury, even at the risk of one's life (Bondurant 1959: 39). Bondurant reports that some Indians refrained from taking action in the hot midday sun in order to spare the Europeans the torture of the scorching heat. And again some others put off their agitation in order to give the Christian opponent time for the celebration of Easter (1959: 120, n). The whole point of the exercise is not to

humiliate the opponents, rubbing their noses into the ground, but to raise them up and give them face-saving opportunities.

Non-violence can take on various forms. The subtle violence involved in hurting the feelings of others is, in Gandhiji's view, far worse than gross murders: the latter are not so numerous compared to the incalculable instances of the daily loss of temper (CW 50: 205-206). Even laying down one's life for a cause, but out of anger, is useless; love should be the only motive (CW 66: 434). Rash judgements and generalizations about a person's character from a single instance and without conclusive evidence are also examples of violence (CW 72: 209). If one does not keep one's tools and implements in good condition, one goes against non-violence. If, for instance, one meets with an accident due to keeping one's bicycle in ill repair, it is a sort of violence (CW 71: 153). Gandhiji pointed out that even bad handwriting is an instance of violence, since it causes pain to others and betrays insufficient concern and love for others. He therefore laid down rules for good handwriting (CW 44: 374).

According to Gandhiji, one should not be a vegetarian merely for health reasons, but for moral reasons. We must rise above our animal nature and live in accordance with our spiritual nature, abstaining from meat. He said that if he were told that he would die if he did not have beef-tea or mutton, he would rather prefer death, for eating meat involved the killing of animals. He thought it was difficult to control one's passions, if one was a non-vegetarian: one becomes what one eats; the coarser the food, the grosser one becomes. On the other hand, he conceded that one might be very careful about one's diet and yet be passionate and violent, while a person who is broad-minded with regard to diet might well be non-violent (Gandhi 1959: 4, 18, 2-21, 24-26).

Theoretically, Gandhiji was against the consumption of even animal products. While he asserted that the milk of animals was not necessary for human life and that we had a right only to our mother's milk, yet he himself did take (goat's) milk because he needed it for his health and strength. He did not give it up, he said, because he could not afford to do so. He felt that from the cruel way in which honey was collected in India, one should avoid it on humanitarian grounds. But he himself did not abstain from honey. He admitted that he did not follow strict logic in this, but also rationalized that life was not governed merely by logic; it was an organic growth that had to pay attention to other considerations too. He realized that, in the strict sense of the word, even the eating of vegetables involved violence; but as long as he continued his physical existence, he could not do without them (Gandhi 1959: 4, 14, 22, 30).

We may mention here a special form of non-violence, according to Gandhiji, viz., the practice of *svadeśī*. It means 'that which belongs or pertains to one's own region or country'. For Gandhiji it meant concentrating on one's immediate 'neighbourhood', i.e., one's religion, one's institutions, one's local produce and industries, one's nation. He

did not want to serve his distant neighbour at the expense of the nearest. He purchased foreign goods, but only those that did not hurt the Indian economy or the local artisans or industries. He considered it part of non-violence to give preference to one's country's products for the sake of the progress of its inhabitants (Chander 1945: 537-539).

Non-violence must flow into service of others. Gandhiji gave shelter to a leper and attended on him personally, even dressing his wounds and massaging his body (Backianadan 1991: 155). For Gandhiji, service took different forms. It included the promotion of nature cures, reduction of communal tensions, village upliftment, providing basic education, eradicating social problems like caste and untouchability, etc. (Backianadan 1991: 221). We should not imagine that we are doing a great favour to the poor and the helpless by serving them. We are just paying back what we owe them. We must serve them with courtesy, respect and sincerity (CW 42: 43-44). Gandhiji felt that it was the duty of everyone to render service. Even sick people do service by thinking pure thoughts, expecting only a minimum of service from others, being cheerful and showing their love to those who serve them. Even devout meditation on God is a service (CW 52: 75).

Non-violence does not consist merely in controlling one's own violent thoughts, words and deeds, but also in checking the violence perpetrated by other individuals and by society (Iyer 1973: 205). In this context, maintaining silence, without speaking out the whole truth, is cowardice (CW 83: 242). Similarly, one should not remain a silent spectator, even when one's enemy is being done to death. On the contrary, one ought to protect the enemy even at the cost of one's life (CW 83: 259).

Non-violence or love is not merely on the horizontal level, towards human beings. It involves also the love of God as well as sub-human beings. For Gandhiji the love of God and the love of fellow human beings were two sides of the same coin. The latter was impossible without the former (CW 48: 411-412). Non-violence also includes good will towards animals, birds and insects (CW 23: 24). Gandhiji himself narrates a touching incident. He found a worm and a weevil in dates that he was eating. He gave them to his secretary, who absentmindedly put them in a washbasin. Later, when Gandhiji got ready to wash his hands, he noticed that the worm and weevil had moved away and he breathed a sigh of relief. He saw God in that worm and weevil, he said. (CW 45: 20) Gandhiji was truly sensitive to all life.

For Gandhiji, non-violence is to be exercised not only on the individual level, but also on the institutional or societal plane. While one must willingly obey the laws of the State, even when they are inconvenient, one must respectfully disobey unjust laws that go against one's conscience. In so doing, one must be ready to suffer the punishments imposed by the State (Chander 1945: 396-397). The motivating force behind non-cooperation is love. Non-cooperation

without love is not only empty; it is satanic (CW 21: 519). Non-cooperation is not a form of violence, even if it results in a certain amount of suffering to the wrongdoer, for one has recourse to it exclusively for the good of the evildoer (CW 23: 407).

In the Gandhian perspective, the ideal State has no political power, because there is no 'State'. In such a State everyone is one's own ruler, without being a thorn in the side of one's neighbour. It is a society based on non-violent cooperation and peaceful co-existence (Dhawan 1946: 266-267). This is an ideal that all should strive for, even if we are unable to achieve it. Gandhiji realized that it would be impossible for a Government to be totally non-violent; but he believed in the possibility of a State that was non-violent to a large extent (Dhawan 1946: 274). He gave special consideration to minority views. According to him, total disregard of the minority by the majority smacks of violence (CW 33: 457-458).

The *Gītā* advocated violence, but Gandhiji believed that non-violence was also the religion of the warrior class (*kṣatriya*) (Chander 1945: 415). Those who are truly non-violent do not need an army for their self-defence. A non-violent army would fight against all injustice, but with 'clean' weapons (CW 90: 503). Yet Gandhiji declared that he would be ready to vote for those who wanted military training, since one could not force people to be non-violent (CW 37: 271). Even though he tried to justify his earlier participation in the wars of Britain (Gandhi: 1944-1949: 1: 84-86, 99-102), he categorically asserted that war was "an un-mixed evil" and that he was "uncompromisingly against all war" (Gandhi 1944-1949: 1: 93, 100).

While not rejecting punitive measures all together, he wanted punishment to be as non-violent as possible. Thus, for instance, while he accepted the need for police to carry arms or use tear gas, he was totally against capital punishment. The purpose is to reform the criminal, not to eliminate him. Given the existential situation, a police force is necessary, but it should be wholly non-violent: the police should be servants, not masters, of the people. Ideally, they will use arms only rarely, and their police work will be primarily with dacoits and robbers. Actually they are reformers, not punishers. With the cooperation of the people, the police will be able to easily deal with the ever-decreasing disturbances in the non-violent State (CW 72: 403).

Gandhiji had first hand experience of life in jail. He was very critical of the treatment prisoners received. Prison authorities, he said, should be humane in their administration. The purpose of punishment is to reform the prisoners, but the sad fact is that it only brutalizes them (CW 23: 508-509). Just as hospitals cure physical diseases, jails are meant to treat mental illnesses. But, unlike hospitals, jails are very poorly maintained. If every prisoner were treated with kindness and sympathy, there would be fewer jails (CW 24: 224).

In Gandhiji's view, self-suffering is an essential aspect of non-violence. The self-suffering of Gandhiji should be distinguished from the traditional

practice of asceticism (*tapas*), which is for the good of the person who undertakes it. For Gandhiji the infliction of suffering on oneself is for the moral benefit of the world in general and, in particular, for bringing about a change for the better in the person for whose sake the suffering is undertaken. It consists in overcoming the opponent by suffering in one's own person (Bondurant 1959: 27-28). Suffering goes beyond the rational defences of the opponent and brings about conversion. "It is a divine law that even the most hard-hearted man will melt if he sees his enemy suffering in innocence" (CW 12: 187). "The appeal of reason is more to the head, but the penetration of the heart comes from suffering. It opens up the inner understanding in man" (CW 48: 189). It is in this spirit that Gandhiji even undertook fasts unto death (CW 53: 460). Bondurant points out that, self-suffering, although least acceptable to the Western mind, paradoxically helps to achieve the dignity of the individual, which is highly prized in Western society (1959: 29).

Self-suffering, in the Gandhian understanding, is always coupled with courage and will power. Suffering is not the last resort or weapon of the weak or cowardly person (Chander 1945: 417-418). It does not mean meek submission to the will of the evildoer; on the contrary one must resist the wrongdoer (Chander 1945: 412). Forgiveness does not spring from weakness, but from strength (CW 19: 401). Even in the case of violence, there is a brave violence, as when four or five men fight valiantly and die by the sword, and a cowardly violence, as when ten thousand armed men attack a village of unarmed people and decimate them (CW 88: 274). Gandhiji even went to the extent of proclaiming, "I do believe that, where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence" (cited by Nelson 1975: 72).

For Gandhiji non-violence was a creed, not a mere strategy or policy. However, he thought that a whole group of people could adopt non-violence as a policy, without accepting it as a belief (CW 35: 457). Gandhiji's secretary Pyarelal opined that even a non-violent campaign based only on non-violence as a policy could prove effective, provided the rules of non-violent discipline and work were sincerely followed (Bondurant 1959: 103-104). Of course those who merely accept non-violence as a strategy could still use force in self-defence, but then they should honestly admit that they have merely adopted non-violence as a policy and not a creed (cited by Iyer 1973: 196-197). Towards the end of his life, however, Gandhiji realized that non-violence as a policy could easily degenerate into a form of cowardice, into pseudo-non-violence (cited by Iyer 1973: 199).

Non-violence is related to Truth or God as means to the end. "To me Truth is God and there is no way to find Truth except the way of Non-violence" (CW 32: 441). One cannot grasp Truth in all its comprehensiveness, but through non-violence one will eventually reach Truth. This absolute Truth is reached gradually, through the intermediary steps of relative truths. These too are to be tested by non-violence, which is the

only way of discovering both relative as well as absolute truth (Bondurant 1959: 25). When there are divergent views, the truth is discovered through non-violence and self-suffering. It should be noted that it is not necessary that the truth rests only with one of the many who hold different opinions; it may well be that they have all grasped the truth, but each in a limited way. Gandhiji had no difficulty working together with those who disagreed with him. It is only when there is radical disagreement, that there is need to win over the other through non-violent means (Bondurant 1959: 31, 34). For Gandhiji, *Satyāgraha*, i.e., insistence on truth or truth-force, is not a violent, physical force, but the 'force' of *ahiṁsā* or love (CW 42: 491).

2. *Non-violence includes other virtues and qualities*

In the Gandhian interpretation, the practice of non-violence involves a number of virtues, qualities and attitudes or disciplines. Following are the main ones:

(1) Detachment: Taking his cue from the doctrine of selfless action propagated by the *Bhagavad-gītā* (e.g., 2.47), Gandhiji linked detachment with non-violence: "When there is no desire for fruit, there is no temptation for untruth or *himsa*. Take any instance of untruth or violence, and it will be found that at its back was the desire to attain the cherished end" (Desai 1948: 132). While granting that the *Gītā* could be interpreted to advocate war, he declared that years of experience had taught him that perfect renunciation of the fruits of one's actions was impossible without perfect non-violence (Desai 1948: 133-134). It is well known that Gandhiji himself lived a simple, frugal, self-sacrificing life.

(2) Compassion: According to Gandhiji non-violence is impossible without compassion, and the extent of non-violence is in direct proportion to the amount of compassion (CW 40: 192). Gandhiji's heart went out to the poor, the downtrodden and those in shackles. Identifying himself with the poor, he wore only a loincloth and built his house in a slum. Referring to the oppressed untouchables as Harijans or people of Viṣṇu (Gandhiji was born in a Vaiṣṇavite family), he gave shelter to one of them in his own home. He urged his followers not only to physically touch the untouchables, but also to serve them with love (CW 22: 117-118). It should be noted, on the other hand, that he did not want to merely dole out food to the poor; he wanted to help them to stand on their own feet: "I do not wish to open free kitchens in India; on the contrary, I want to close them....I wish to make everyone self-reliant" (CW 25: 61). He urged his disciples to be strict with themselves, but liberal with others (CW 27: 235-236). On the other hand, he also held that one must sometimes be hard in order to the truly kind (CW31: 446).

(3) Humility: Gandhiji taught that non-violence was humbler than even the mango tree, which bends low as it grows up. Instead of proving its own point, non-violence, he said, lets all others prove their point of view (CW 34: 357).

(4) Acceptance of, and openness to, all religions and cultures: Gandhiji's

prayer for adherents of another religion was, "O God! give all Thy creation wisdom, so that each may worship and follow Thee according to his light and grow in his own faith"; and not "O God! give Thy creation wisdom, so that each may worship and follow Thee even as I try to do" (CW 57: 353-354). He believed in the equality of all religions (CW 51: 316-317). He declared, "I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible" (cited by Nelson 1975: 60).

(5) Celibacy: Gandhiji believed that perfect non-violence necessarily implied celibacy. Married people have to be more concerned about the welfare of their spouses and their families; they cannot practise universal love. If those who are already married live as if they were not married, i.e., as brother and sister, they will become free for universal service (CW 44: 68-69). Although married himself, he decided at the age of 37 to abstain from sex and kept this resolution until his death. In order to test the power of his non-violence, he experimented with sharing his bed with naked women to check whether he could remain chaste even in thought. He made this experiment publicly known and had to justify himself in the face of a lot of criticism (CW 87: 13-14, 89-92).

Gandhiji's non-violence, therefore, included all moral virtues. In this he followed the Jain view, which makes violence the root sin: all sins are in some way forms of violence, which is the basic sin.

3. *Unavoidable Violence*

Gandhiji realized that perfect non-violence was impossible as long as people had bodies. In such a state, perfect non-violence was only a theory like Euclid's point or straight line (Gandhi 1944-1949: 1: 332). There is violence even in eating fruits. At this rate one would have to abstain from almost all kinds of foods, he said (CW 28: 240). He held that, if insects, like ants, or animals, like monkeys, dogs or leopards, harmed or adversely affected human beings, they could be driven away or even be killed (CW 84: 230-231). He approved the killing of rabid dogs as the lesser of two evils. Things are not always what they seem, he explained: sometimes one has to resort to violence as the truest form of non-violence (CW 31: 486-489). He put a calf to sleep when it was in pain and there was no chance of recovery. He considered this an entirely unselfish act (Gandhi 1944-1949: 1: 151). He was painfully aware that he killed many organisms by the mere fact of his breathing. Similarly the use of antiseptics and disinfectants involved violence. He permitted snakes to be killed and bullocks to be driven away with a stick. A certain amount of violence just cannot be avoided as long as we are in the physical body, he said with regret (Gandhi 1959: 22). Although at one time he thought that a non-violent woman did not need to defend her honour, since the power of her non-violence and purity were enough to prevent the assailant from violating her (Gandhi 1944-1949: 1: 48), yet he later encouraged women to bravely defend themselves (Gandhi 1944-49: 2: 142).

A woman is free to use every means that she can think of in order to defend her honour. Similarly a man who is witness to the assault should not be a passive spectator but, in the spirit of non-violence, protect the woman even at the risk of his life (Gandhi 1957: 167-168). He also thought it was proper to dispatch a lunatic who went berserk, killing people with a sword, and no one dared to capture him alive (Gandhi 1957: 156). If his child were to get rabies, he would consider it his duty to take the life of the child in order to bring relief from the terrible agony (Gandhi 1957: 156). While Gandhiji was not out and out for euthanasia for human beings, he did approve of it under certain conditions (Backianadan 1991: 93 and n. 347).

4. *The Superiority of Non-violence over Violence*

According to Gandhiji, violence is incapable of radically destroying evil. It only changes the form of evil (Gandhi 1944-1949: 2: 230). History teaches us, he said, that those who resort to violence even for a just cause ultimately fall prey to the very same disease of violence (cited by Iyer 1973: 198). Revolutions bring violence in their wake (Gandhi 1957: 164-165). Violence is very visible and palpable, while non-violence is three-fourths invisible. It has a hidden and unconscious effect, which is far more potent, and it travels at great speed (CW 64: 222-223). Once non-violence is established in one place, its influence spreads everywhere (CW 68: 29). Even when many lives are lost by resorting to non-violence, in the long run this will result in less loss of life than if one had recourse to violence. Besides such suffering is both ennobling and beneficial (Gandhi 1944-1949: 1: 49). Gandhiji perceptively pointed out that violence did not change the adversaries and their perception of the truth, even if it subdued them (Parekh 1997: 52-53).

5. *The Basis for Non-violence*

Gandhiji was no systematic philosopher or theologian, and did not follow any one particular philosophical or theological system (CW 34: 91, 93). Yet, from his writings, we can cull out the following basic or foundational principles, on which he may be said to have built the edifice of non-violence:

(1) He believed in the oneness of all reality: God and other beings in the universe are all one (CW 32: 218). All our souls are one; they differ only accidentally. Hence we cannot have any enemy and should be non-violent towards all (CW 32: 189).

(2) He believed that as social beings we are interconnected and interdependent. Those who consider themselves independent cease to be non-violent (CW 41: 345). Thus we are not only responsible for one another, but whatever we do also affects one another.

(3) He believed that all human beings are brothers and sisters (CW 58: 50).

(4) For him non-violence is essential to human nature. "Non-violence is the law of the human race" (Gandhi 1957: 154). "If mankind was not habitually non-violent, it would have been self-destroyed ages ago" (CW 42: 363). As animals we are violent, but as spirit we are non-violent. When we awaken to the spirit within, we cannot but be non-violent (cited by Iyer 1973: 211).

(5) Gandhiji believed in the innate goodness of human nature, which non-violence, coupled with suffering, can evoke (CW 69: 70). A wicked person is temporarily debased, but deep down every human being is good (CW 45: 222).

(6) Non-violence is based on belief in God: faith in God is itself the power behind non-violence (CW 69: 226). Without trusting in God, that mysterious, supreme power or force, non-violence is impossible (CW 76: 232).

These, then, appear to me to be the basic underlying principles of Gandhiji's doctrine of non-violence.

II. Critical Appreciation

The unique contribution of Gandhiji was to extend the concept of non-violence from the individual and personal sphere to the social and political domain. He gave the traditional non-violence of India a new orientation: he adopted it as a principle and technique for social and political change as well as religious reform (Bondurant 1959: 112). It is because of him that the word 'non-violence' has entered into the vocabulary of politics. Furthermore, he freed non-violence from its cloistered confines and transformed it into a mass movement. For him non-violence was the principle that governed his life in every sphere, domestic or institutional, economic, social and political (Bondurant 1959: 113). Although his non-violence encompassed the social and political dimensions too, it remained eminently personal: it was aimed against evil, not against the evildoer. In fact, he went out of his way to ensure the well-being of the opponent.

Similarly asceticism, sacrifice and suffering which, in the Indian tradition, were confined to the private life of an individual, were now brought into the public sphere of politics and society. It became a means not only for personal salvation, but also for social and political welfare. Suffering became a means of bringing about a change of heart in the opponent (Bondurant 1959: 113-115). He also departed from tradition, by positively seeking to protect the opponent from harm even at the risk of one's life (Bondurant 1959: 119). Gandhiji was also unique in distinguishing between non-violence as a creed and as a policy, as well as between non-violence of the strong and the weak (Iyer 1973: 192).

Gandhiji's non-violence strove to keep a healthy balance between self-identity, self-respect, self-worth and honour on the one hand, and openness, inclusiveness and dialogue on the other hand. He was able to stay clear of self-righteousness, fanaticism and bigotry (Parekh 1997: 94-95). Non-violence was not to be limited to action alone; it also extended to words and thoughts. Although he was not totally free from utopianism and romanticism, he succeeded to a large extent in keeping his feet firmly rooted in reality. "Unlike sentimental humanists Gandhi identified enemies and showed who to fight against, but unlike conventional revolutionary theorists he also saw them as potential partners in a common struggle" (Parekh 1997: 96).

For Gandhiji, non-violence is not just for an elite coterie, but it can be practised by all, even the masses. "If

truth be not a monopoly of the few why should non-violence, its counterpart, be otherwise?" (CW 43: 309). However, with a sense of realism, he felt he could not expect the masses to practise non-violence even in thought; he would be satisfied, if they practised it in word and deed (CW 76: 333). Nevertheless, the fact remains that thousands of people voluntarily entered prisons; they were beaten and killed, without their raising even a finger in self-defence. Thousands of women collected contraband salt without harbouring any hatred. Thousands of farmers revolted against agrarian evils without bearing any ill-will (Gandhi 1944-1949: 1: 279). Gandhiji's secretary Pyarelal asserted that it was possible to run a non-violent movement among the masses merely by their accepting it as a policy, not a creed, provided they followed the leaders who practised pure non-violence (Bondurant 1959: 103-104). In this context, it is interesting to report that, in sociological studies of three Gandhian movements (Bardoli, Rajkot and Pardi), it was found that it was the masses, and not so much the leaders, who practised non-violence as a creed (Nakhre 1982: 72-73, 96-102).

For non-violence to be successful in the political and social sphere, it is not necessary to accept the Hindu world-view. It has proved successful in other religious traditions and social milieus. E.g., although Islam and Hinduism differ in many important points and although there was a world of difference between the relatively mild-mannered Indian and the hot-blooded Pathans (Bondurant 1959:132, 141-142), yet a Pathan named Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, more fondly known as the Frontier Gandhi, organized a very effective non-violent movement called the Khudai Khidmatgar or the 'Servants of God' (Bondurant 1959: 131-144). Martin Luther King, who was a Christian, adopted and adapted Gandhiji's method of non-violence in his Civil Rights Movement in the United States of America. Non-violent approaches are being tried out in several other parts of the world. Calling the Chinese his brothers and sisters, the Dalai Lama wants a non-violent solution to the autonomy of his homeland Tibet and, in agreement with history, assures the Chinese that Tibet will continue to remain linked with China. In South Africa, Nelson Mandela did not hold any grudge against the Whites even after being incarcerated for 27 years. When he became President, Mandela invited his white jailor to the inauguration (Gandhi 1999: 400-401). In 1995 South Africa's new democratically elected Parliament set up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, headed by Nobel Laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu. It's purpose was to bring about peace and reconciliation. The Commission gave ample opportunity for both White and Black perpetrators of political crimes to confess to the truth of their atrocities and receive amnesty and reconciliation, and for the victims to experience healing through forgiveness. In an Interview with Frank Ferrari, the Archbishop reveals the benefits that accrued from this venture to both victim and perpetrator (Ferrari 1997: 13-18). Striking a note of hope for the future, Archbishop Tutu declares

in his book, *No Future without Forgiveness*, "No problem anywhere can ever again be considered to be intractable.... Our experiment is going to succeed because God wants us to succeed.... God wants to show that there is life after conflict and repression – that because of forgiveness there is a future" (1999: 282). It is important to remark that the Archbishop replaces 'retributive justice' with 'restorative justice'. In retributive justice criminals are punished for the sake of vengeance rather than to prevent crime or reform them. Restorative justice, on the other hand, promotes reconciliation between the victim and the perpetrator. While it seeks to do justice to the victim, it also restores harmony.

On the one hand, Gandhiji exclaimed that he would lose all interest in life, if he thought he could not attain perfect love on earth (CW 14:146). He valued it so much that he asserted that it couldn't be bartered away even for independence (CW 75: 220-221). On the other hand, in a more realistic mood, he realized that perfect non-violence is not attainable like Euclid's point or straight line (Gandhi 1944-1949: 1: 332). "Although Gandhiji was an absolutist in regard to his faith in *ahimsa* as a creed, he was clearly willing to make qualifications....He valued *satya* [truth] even more than *ahimsa*, justice even more than abstention from violence, courage more than mere non-participation in war" (Iyer 1973: 202). What was important for him was the spirit of non-violence, and not blindly following the letter of the law.

Even though Gandhiji did make exceptions, for him the principle of non-violence was never wrong. He said, for instance, that if violence did break out after his death, people should conclude that it was because his violence was imperfect or even non-existent (CW 59: 420). Gandhiji did allow exceptions, but these were due to unavoidable circumstances, human weakness and lack of courage. Although these anomalies were part and parcel of reality, he did not nuance his theory accordingly and integrate them into his doctrine. "Rather than insist on a pure theory and permit impure practices, the more sensible thing would have been to legitimise and regulate the latter by making space for them within the theory itself" (Parekh 1997:101).

In some respects Gandhiji tended to be utopian. His critique of the State, his advocacy of a politically mature citizenry, his insistence on humane ways of treating criminals, etc. all have inspired people in different countries. Yet, his dream for a totally non-violent State, a non-violent army and police force appear to be too idealistic. A certain amount of coercion from the State is both necessary and wholesome.

As a matter of fact, one may say that, in a certain sense, Gandhiji's non-violence does contain an element of force or coercion, or at least influence or moral pressure or persuasion. It does not advocate physical force, but it does have power, even if it is not violent, aggressive power. After all, it is not for nothing that Gandhiji referred to non-violence as 'soul-force'. No doubt there is a world of difference between non-violent coercion and violent coercion. In the former case, there is a willingness

to undergo self-suffering, while in the latter there is a deliberate inflicting of suffering on the adversary. Nevertheless, in the non-violent case, even though no harm is intended and efforts are made to minimize it, still a certain amount of moral pressure is exerted on the mind and will of the antagonist not only through the use of reason but also through self-suffering, and furthermore through non-cooperation or civil disobedience. Withholding of cooperation may cause inconvenience and loss to the opponent. Of course this is nothing compared to the excessive harm caused by violent coercion (Bondurant 1959: 9-11). Linked with this idea of moral coercion or pressure on the adversary, is the possibility of Gandhiji's having imposed non-violence on his followers. Although, theoretically, Gandhiji never wanted to coerce his followers, there may have been occasions when the power of his personality as well as conviction left some of his followers with practically no alternative but to follow suit. As Iyer puts it, "It is, of course, very difficult to draw the line between persuasion and intimidation....between entirely peaceful and forceful conversion when no physical force or material inducement is used" (Iyer 1973: 209). What must be borne in mind, however, is that even this minimum pressure is not directly intended and, most importantly, is motivated by love, not hate. This slight coercion is admitted as a necessary evil in order to obtain a greater good.

Gandhiji's non-violent approach to the resolution of conflict appealed both to the reason as well as the heart. It was concerned not only with eliminating the conflict, but also mending and promoting the relationship between the opponents. However, Gandhiji did not realize sufficiently that there need not be unanimity of views even among honest and sincere persons. E.g., some look on euthanasia and war as morally sinful, while others think they are justified under certain conditions. Now it is true that Gandhiji also appealed to the heart, through self-suffering. Many indeed are moved by suffering, but Gandhiji did not pay attention to the fact that, depending on whether one considered the suffering deserving or not, the reaction could be different. The Jewish holocaust did not prick the consciences of some of the Nazis. Some Americans suffered no twinge of conscience when the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, because they thought the Japanese deserved it. Moreover, while it is true that human nature is basically good, the fact is that some people are so pathologically warped that they are practically impervious to any wholesome influence on the mind or the heart (Parekh 1997: 59-60).

Gandhiji felt that, after his conquests, Hitler would go empty-handed as Alexander did. Europe should have dealt with him in a non-violent manner. In this case, even if Hitler might (but only might) have taken possession of the European countries, he would have done so without blood shed and the loss of lives (Gandhi 1944-1949: 1: 310-312). As for the Jews, he thought they too should have offered only non-violent resistance, and he compared their plight to that of the Indians in

South Africa, saying that the Jews were in a better position to offer non-violent resistance than the Indians in South Africa (Gandhi 1944-1949: 1: 184-187). In response, the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber penned a letter to Gandhiji, pointing out that there was a world of difference between the Jews in the concentration camps and the Indians who were restricted to certain areas in S. Africa, and that the non-violence of the Jews was to no avail: "a diabolic universal steam-roller cannot thus be withstood" (1963: 139-141). The Managing Editor of *The Jewish Frontier* wrote, "A Jewish Gandhi in Germany, should one arise, could 'function' for about five minutes – until the first Gestapo agent would lead him, not to a concentration camp, but directly to the guillotine" (Gandhi 1944-1949: 1: 499). Gandhiji, on the other hand, believed that even Hitler could be influenced by non-violent action (Gandhi 1944-1949: 1: 364), that non-violence would certainly bear fruit, even if it be after the life-time of the sufferers (Gandhi 1944-1949: 1: 235). However, it is doubtful whether non-violence can always be effective in a brutal, totalitarian regime, against "a diabolic universal steam-roller", as Buber put it (Parekh 1997: 60).

On one occasion, when asked whether it was possible to administer violence in a spirit of love, Gandhiji denied it point blank. But he proceeded to mention the incident where he put a calf to death because it was lame, full of sores, unable to eat and breathed with difficulty. This action, he said, was non-violent because it was a totally unselfish act since it had no other purpose than to relieve the poor calf from its excruciating pain (Gandhi 1944-1949: 1: 151). Gandhiji rules out the possibility of unselfish violence. In this context, it is appropriate to quote the words of Buber, in the above-mentioned letter to Gandhiji: "I do not want force. But if there is no other way of preventing the evil destroying the good, I trust I shall use force....We should be able even to fight for justice – but to fight lovingly" (Buber 1963:146). If non-violence can be rooted in love as well as in hate (as in the non-violence of the weak, as Gandhiji himself emphasized), there can be a violence fuelled by hatred and a violence springing from love as, for example, when parents scold their children out of love. We have seen that Gandhiji accepted the possibility of eliminating a lunatic who had run amuck and could not be captured. Now Gandhiji referred to Hitler as "an obviously mad but intrepid youth" (Gandhi 1944-1949: 1:184). But, unlike in the case of the insane person, he did not want violence to be used against Hitler. It is true that, in the example of the single lunatic, the matter would have ended with dispatching that person; whereas in Hitler's case, violence would have generated counter violence. Nevertheless, one may say that Gandhiji need not have insisted only on one method to the exclusion of others. "Different circumstances require different responses, and violence might sometimes achieve results that non-violence is either incapable of or can achieve only at an unacceptably high price in human suffering" (Parekh 1997: 61).

III. Reflections on Non-Violence and Its Contemporary Relevance

Gandhiji had asserted that non-violence is not a meek submission to the will of the evildoer, but it means the pitting of one's whole soul against the will of the tyrant. He rightly held that true non-violence comes from strength, not weakness. Although on rare occasions violence too can spring from courage, yet often enough we observe in our daily life that it is frequently the weak, e.g., those who experience a sense of inferiority complex, who try to dominate others. It is the truly great who are truly humble. In his Sermon on the Mount, which was a favourite passage for Gandhiji, Christ teaches, "If anyone hits you on the right cheek, offer him the other as well" (Mt 5.39). This is no meek submission. There is tremendous strength and power in such an action. There are very few people who will dare to strike back at a person who offers the other cheek. In fact, such opponents are generally so taken by surprise that they lose their balance and poise as it were. The lack of physical resistance from the non-violent person is so unexpected, that the adversaries become confused and helpless and don't know how to deal with this new situation. A secretary of General Smuts, who had imprisoned Gandhiji in South Africa, confessed his helplessness to Gandhiji, "I often wish you took to violence like the English strikers, and then we would know at once how to dispose of you. But you will not injure your enemy. You desire victory by self-suffering alone and never transgress your self-imposed limits of courtesy and chivalry. And that is what reduces us to sheer helplessness" (cited by Nelson 1975: 69). Moreover, when, contrary to their expectations, the antagonists experience kindness and compassion instead, it may move them to reflect on their actions and open their hearts to conversion.

On the other hand, if, instead of offering the other cheek, the person strikes back, we can be sure the fight will not stop there. Even if opponents are not physically strong enough to retaliate, they will strike back in other ways, like getting other people to do the dirty job, scheming against those persons, or speaking ill of them, etc. Violence breeds violence.

Many a non-vegetarian does not feel anything when eating chicken, or mutton or beef or pork because it is placed before us all dressed-up and camouflaged with sauce and curry. However, I am told that many who work in the slaughter houses just cannot bring themselves to eat meat because they see before their very eyes the severed heads and rivers of gushing blood and hear the blood-curdling screams of pain. But then, when you come to think of it, from the Hindu point of view, even the consumption of vegetarian food is equally violent. Gandhiji's non-violence towards animals and even plants was based on the Hindu belief in rebirth. An ignorant human soul can be reborn, for instance, in an animal body or a plant body. Essentially speaking, there is no difference between a plant, an animal, a human being or a minor deity; the difference is only in degree. No wonder that Gandhiji had qualms in eating even fruits and vegetables. He did not,

however, go as far as the Jain religion, which believes that there are living, ignorant souls not only in plants, but also in so-called material things. The Christian tradition does not have to face this problem because of it making an essential distinction between humans, animals, plants, and so forth. Sub-human beings, according to Christian tradition, are to be used as means by human beings, who are ends in themselves. (This of course has landed Christianity into other problems, such as the conquest and exploitation of nature, etc.) In any case, many a Christian – and also many a Hindu, Buddhist or whoever – is unnecessarily violent towards insects and animals. I have seen people conversing with one another and, at the same time, even without being sufficiently aware of it, crushing underfoot some harmless ants (the ones that do not bite) moving about on the floor. Those ants are not going to bring the building down, and yet we go merrily ahead, blissfully oblivious of the sacredness of life. In Christian Spain and countries that were colonized by Spain, we have the cruel sport of bullfighting. Briefly, this is how it came across to an amateur like myself when I watched it once on TV in Spain: the bull is systematically weakened by being pierced by lances and by three pairs of sticks with sharp barbed points that are hooked on to its neck and left hanging there, as the blood trickles down its neck. The matador strides into the arena several times to tease the bull and make him see red. If the skilful matador succeeds, as he often does, in tiring out the bull and making it give up the fight, he slays it with a special sword, deeply piercing it between the bull's shoulder blades. And the crowd of spectators in the arena as well as those glued to the TV sets take sadistic delight in all this, loudly cheering *ole*! Maneka Gandhi, India's best known animal rights activist has chronicled atrocities by Hindus on animals like foxes, who are hunted during the festival of Makara Saṅkrānti, or on snakes, who are captured during the feast of Nagapañcamī (Gandhi 1994: 73-78). One has only to browse through her books entitled, *Heads and Tails* and *The Second Heads and Tails*, to be stunned into disbelief at the senseless cruelty that is daily meted out to countless animals of various kinds, to fish, coral, birds and butterflies. Recently, an international organization called the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) shot incriminating footage in the Deonar abattoir, revealing the barbarous and inhuman treatment of animals before they are slaughtered (*The Indian Express* 2000: 2). More recently, the Indian Government's Committee for the Purpose of Control and Supervision of Experiments on Animals (CPCSEA) reported the miserable conditions under which horses are kept by the King Institute in Chennai, which manufactures anti-snake venom serum (*The Times of India* 2001: 6).

Many vegetarians do not realize that curds (yoghurt) are non-vegetarian because of the live lactic bacteria in them. There are some who are stricter than most vegetarians in that they avoid even animal products like milk. Nowadays they are called Vegans. In any case, modern life makes it very

difficult for a strict vegetarian to avoid all contact with animal flesh and animal products. Many soaps are made from tallow, which is animal fat (Gandhi 1996: 70-71). Numerous brands of ice cream contain animal fat and a sort of glue produced by boiling down certain parts of animals (Gandhi 1994: 61). Why, even sweets that have silver or gold foil on them are not pure vegetarian fare: the thin sheets of silver or gold are placed between fresh bullock or buffalo intestines and repeatedly beaten to form the fine foil. In this process of course tiny bits of the animal gut mesh with the foil, and such sweets are even served in temples. Often enough the '*choona*' or 'lime', with which the betel leaf or *paan* is spiked, is made from seashells (Gandhi 1996: 68-70). Most of the booming business of cosmetics thrives on animal cruelty. All of us are aware of the sources of fur coats and bags made from live crocodiles, lizards and snakes. We all know from where silk comes, even if we do not realize that some 20,000 silk moths are boiled alive to make just one kilo of silk. But perhaps few of us are aware that several types of talcum powder, lipstick and hair dye are made safe for human use by testing them on squirrel monkeys, to find out at which dosage these monkeys die. A number of aftershave lotions are made burn proof by testing them on the bare skin of guinea pigs after their hair is pulled off. Many a perfume is made from civet musk. The civet is whipped, so that when it is in pain it secretes its musk into its pouch. The latter is then forced open and scraped with a spatula. Musk is also obtained from musk deer, which are caught in spiked traps. And the litany continues with pearls from tortured oysters, fur from strangled rabbits, and so on and so forth (Gandhi 1994: 52-54).

The Newspapers regularly report murders, rapes and other violent crimes. But some of us can be blissfully unaware of others forms of violence in our society; in fact, we may not even see them as examples of violence. We may pride ourselves as being more civilized than people in ancient times. We think we are not as barbarous as the gladiators and duellists of old. But this is far from the truth. Take boxing, for instance. Here is a sport in which one human being physically hurts a fellow human being. They are 'punished' and 'knocked out', to use just a couple of the expressions so common in describing boxing. Not only are the boxers badly bruised and severely injured; some have even died in the ring. One has only to glance at the bloodthirsty spectators, the way they gesticulate, shout and cheer, and even go at each other: it just shows the extent of violence in our society. And this 'civilized' sport is a multi-million dollar business! The same can be said of similar sports like wrestling, especially free-style wrestling. And it is all in the name of entertainment! Similarly, whether it is pigeon shoots in the U.S.A, where up to 25000 pigeons are released and shotgunned by shooters (*Times of India*, 1998: 11) or cock fights in our villages, we keep on brazenly amusing ourselves at the expense of animals too.

Apparently even plants have (rudimentary) feelings. Experiments have found that when we 'talk to plants'

and show them attention, they grow and flourish much more than plants that are ignored, even if these latter are given the same water, manure, etc. as the former. If in the hot summer we walk past a withering tree or a parched plant, do we pause for even a moment in sympathy, thinking of the poor plant thirsting for water? Some may think that these are ridiculous examples, but it is in such ways that we can develop sensitivity towards all life.

It is worth pointing out that non-violence also benefits the agent of non-violence. The Templeton Foundation has recently funded an on-going "Forgiveness Research" Programme. This research, led by the Director of the Programme, Everett L. Worthington, Jr., is making it amply clear that forgiveness and reconciliation are good for the well-being not only of the soul, but also of the psyche and the body. In a programme entitled, "Eye for an Eye", and telecast on 16th-17th May 1999, CNN showed how rage and the thirst for revenge not only consume the soul and rob it of its inner peace, but also tear apart the body. Instead of hurting the hated person, it hurts oneself. Laboratory experiments proved that in unforgiving conditions one's blood pressure, heart rate and sweat rate shot up. The conclusion is clear: revenge is not sweet, but bitter; while forgiveness and reconciliation take the hurt away. Moreover, experiments with chimpanzees indicate that there seems to be even an evolutionary basis for forgiveness: it is vital for the survival of the species. There is now a scientific confirmation of what we have observed in daily life: have we not noticed an infuriated person becoming flushed? Have we not observed such a person's stammering speech and quivering lips?

Non-violence in its complete and perfect form is surely utopian, but one cannot deny its importance and significance for the world of today, and if we choose to ignore it, our very survival is at stake. A nuclear war, for instance, will bring total destruction. In this nuclear age, the only way open to us is peaceful dialogue. Gandhiji asked rhetorically, "Has not the atom bomb proved the futility of all violence?" (Gandhi 1994-1949: 2: 55).

What does the future hold for us? Our future lies in our children. Are we preparing them for peace or for annihilation? Some of the signs are definitely disturbing. Violence is on the increase in movies, T.V. programmes and even cartoon books. One has only to enter a toyshop to see the great variety of toys related to war: toy guns, tanks, battle ships, bomber aircraft, and so on. So many of the computer or video games too are full of violence. We seem to be telling our children that war is fun, an enjoyable game.

While many children are being initiated into a culture of violence, some adults, on their part, decided to attack the apostle of non-violence himself. In 1998 a Marathi Play, entitled *Mī Nāthurām Goḍse boltoy* ("I am Nathuram Godse Speaking"), which glorified Gandhiji's assassin, was playing to packed houses. It was reported that the audience cheered and applauded with gusto (*The Indian Express*, 1998: 3). It should be noted that, yielding to the cries of protest

from several quarters, the Government finally banned the controversial play. Nathuram Godse's bullet silenced the Mahatma, but his voice still speaks to us, challenging us to strive after non-violence, especially during this International Year and International Decade of Peace.

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