

THE IDEA OF TRUTH AND NON-VIOLENCE IN GANDHI'S SOCIAL THOUGHT

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ABSTRACT

Mahatma Gandhi believed that the progress of a nation depends on the welfare of all people. His idea of Sarvodaya stands for the equal upliftment of every individual in society. He paid special attention to the poor, women, labourers, and other marginalised groups. Gandhi considered Satya (Truth) and Ahimsa (Non-violence) as the foundation of social life. He believed that Truth can only be achieved through non-violence. Though Gandhi was not a systematic philosopher, his ideas developed from personal experience and moral practice. He rejected the idea of the greatest good of the majority and supported decentralisation of power. According to Gandhi, a non-violent and cooperative society alone can ensure justice, peace, and equality for all.

Keywords: Truth (Satya), Non-violence (Ahimsa), Marginalise, Sarvodaya, Self-realisation, Empowerment, Co-operation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation, believed in the welfare of all people. His ideas were based on Truth and Non-violence. Through his concept of Sarvodaya, he aimed to build a society where every individual, especially the weak and marginalised, could live with dignity and equality. Gandhi, the Father of the Nation, was devoted to the thoughts of the welfare of the people. He believed that the progress of a nation is broadly contingent upon the well-being of its entire population. Although his concern was for all, Gandhi was particularly attentive to the cause of the marginalised communities. He understood that the Harijans, the labouring classes, cottage industry workers, and women who constitute an important half of society were being crushed under the wheels of patriarchal norms and systemic inequality. So holistic social development was not possible unless intensive focus is bestowed on these neglected segments. Thus, the central notion of Gandhi's concept of Sarvodaya was the equal upliftment of all. An ideal society, he believed, would be built through the co-participation of men and women. Hence, for Gandhi, the empowerment of women was an essential agenda.

The kind of society that Gandhi envisioned, where no single group, whether rich or poor, male or female, would hold dominance. Instead, society would be built on mutual cooperation. The fundamental principle of this society would be ahimsya, i.e., Non-violence, and its ultimate goal would be satya, i.e., Truth. In such a society rooted in the principle of non-violence, no individual can impose their will upon another. As one's own perspective carries weight to himself the other's opinions have to be considered as well. While disagreements are inevitable, they must be resolved by prioritising Truth through dialogue and mutual understanding.

Here we would inspect with respect to "Gandhian Philosophy" whether Gandhi himself consciously engaged in philosophical inquiry in the manner of a traditional philosopher. A review of his journals and letters reveals that he never actively engaged in formal philosophical debates, nor did he intend to propagate a specific doctrine. He merely recorded the realisations he gathered throughout the journey of his life in his several pieces of writing. For this reason, he cannot be called a systematic philosopher in the conventional sense, and we should not expect the rigid consistency typically demanded of philosophical systems. He never felt obliged to establish himself as a philosopher, and thus cannot be held accountable for the technical limitations of philosophical argumentation. In that sense, he remained intellectually free—never hesitant to explain his thoughts as he experienced them and deeply attentive to the subtle analysis of inner experience. His ideas arose from profound self-realisation. Therefore, the critical standards by which we judge formal philosophical systems may not always be appropriate for evaluating his thought.

However, Gandhi's ideas are immensely significant for contemporary life and society. Though he did not belong to the community of professional philosophers and did not aim to establish a defined doctrine, his reflections contain elements that are deeply philosophical. Many thinkers have therefore attempted to shape these reflections into theoretical frameworks.

What emerges most clearly is a philosophy of life latent in daily experiences of Truth. He did not think only of specific communities or classes; he was equally concerned with the betterment of all humanity. But he believed that

those who are subordinated deserve special care. He rejected all forms of unjust preference but acknowledged the necessity of giving additional support to the weak. He claimed no originality for his ideas, asserting that the principles he spoke of already existed within humanity; his role was merely to bring inherent truths into clear expression.

Satya and Ahimsa

Gandhi repeatedly asserted that the only way to make life's troublesome path less troubled is through the realisation of truth. Yet he did not claim that Truth appears identical to all; Truth may differ from person to person. Regardless of its form, however, the path toward Truth must be non-violent. Truth cannot be reached through violence; in such cases, it remains elusive. Truth and Non-violence are inseparable—two sides of the same coin. In this context, we can refer to Gandhi's own writing.

"My daily experiences of those who are working with me is that every problem has a solution if we are determined to make the law of Truth and Non-violence the law of life. For Truth and Non-violence are to me faces of the same coin."¹

It means my everyday experience indicates that every problem will find its solution if we take the principles of truth and non-violence as the principles for life.

"My Ahimsa is neither maimed nor weak. It is all-powerful. Where there is Ahimsa, there is Truth, and Truth is God. How he manifests himself, I cannot say. All I know is that he is all-pervading, and where he is, all is well. There is therefore one law for all. Whenever in the world Truth and Non-violence reign supreme, there is peace and bliss."²

It means we should not be taking the idea of Non-violence as something fragile. It is a very potent idea. Truth is where Non-violence is. And Truth is God.

Although he admits that the manner of Truth's manifestation cannot be fully known, he affirms its all-pervasive presence. Truth carries with it peace and joy. Truth is the goal; Non-violence is the means—yet Non-violence is also intrinsically valuable. According to Gandhi, truth is the ultimate goal, and non-violence is the means to achieve it. However, non-violence is not merely valuable as a tool—it possesses an inherent, intrinsic value of its own.

As non-violence possesses intrinsic value, Gandhi recognised it as the most effective method for resolving any conflict. In this context, he established a clear hierarchy between cowardice, violence, and non-violence. He placed cowardice at the very bottom. To him, violence is superior to cowardice; for instance, if a group of physically strong youths harasses a frail elderly man, the necessity of protest is undeniable. Rather than remaining passive like a coward, Gandhi advocated for speaking out in protest. Even then, one must first attempt to resolve the situation through non-violent persuasion. However, if that proves ineffective, the path of violence may be taken. In other words, violence is preferable to cowardice, and non-violence remains superior to violence.

Through this perspective, we find a sense of situational pragmatism in Gandhi's thought. He believed that making decisions based on the specific context of a situation is essential. Yet, he simultaneously maintained that violence only paves the way for even greater violence. Therefore, violence can never be a true solution to any problem; remaining non-violent is always the ultimate ideal. Truth and non-violence form the very foundation of Gandhi's social order.

In Gandhi's envisioned society, all the people would walk the path of Truth and Non-violence. He believed that only by adopting this path could true equality be established in society. It is important to note that Gandhi's philosophical interpretation of the relationship between violence and non-violence differs from the conventional view. Here, there is no rigid binary opposition between the two; they are not merely opposites. Rather, Non-violence represents a state of transcendence over violence.

Non-violence Violence Cowardice

The social system Gandhi envisioned and dreamt of establishing is known as the 'Sarvodaya' society. The word 'Sarvodaya' is a combination of two words: 'Sarva' (all) and 'Udaya' (upliftment), signifying the welfare of all people. According to him, social consciousness is an integral part of Sarvodaya. Its core ideal is the well-being of every single individual, ensuring that not even one person remains neglected, oppressed, or deprived. Just as the wealthy, the landlords, and the elite enjoy various privileges, the poor, the farmers, and the marginalised or destitute classes must

¹ . Young India Patrika-01.10.1931

² . Harijan Patrika-29.09.1946

also have access to the same opportunities. Similarly, just as men enjoy advantages in society, women in a patriarchal system must be granted equal rights and facilities.

Gandhi did not advocate for 'the greatest good of the greatest number.' He argued that if we seek the welfare of the majority—for instance, the well-being of 99 out of 100 people—then the one person left behind becomes neglected and disenfranchised. That single individual's exclusion would ultimately hinder the overall progress of society; those left behind invariably become obstacles to collective advancement. Therefore, Gandhi maintained that our objective must be the equal benefit of every human being. When the welfare of all is achieved, no one lags behind. Consequently, utilitarianism finds no support in Gandhi's social framework. Since utilitarianism does not account for the absolute hundred per cent, it remains inconsistent with Gandhi's principle of non-violence. His social system is designed so that not a single soul is deprived.

In any discussion of Gandhi's social framework, his principle of decentralisation is essential to be taken note of. This principle specifically concerns the decentralisation of power. Gandhi argued that if power is concentrated, only a select few benefit; much like large fish in a pond devouring the small, those who hold centralised power will inevitably rule and exploit others, deepening class inequality. For this reason, he prioritized the development of cottage industries over large-scale industrialisation. While rural cottage industries provide sustenance for countless individuals, the massive machinery used in large-scale industries strips people of their livelihoods, resulting in widespread unemployment. Furthermore, these large industries inflate the profits of a specific class as the capitalists and industrialists making them progressively wealthier. This process creates a bifurcated society: on one side are the affluent who hold power, and on the other are the common poor who continue to descend into destitution.

In a similar vein, within a male-dominated society, power is monopolised by men, thereby restricting the agency of women. Patriarchal social structures have historically refused to recognise women's rights to self-expression, education, and autonomy. Consequently, the progress of women is stifled; they remain exploited and are prevented from playing an active role in societal affairs. Gandhi sought to abolish this divide between the oppressor and the oppressed. He believed that such classes are a direct result of the concentration of power, which prevents the holistic development of society. However, through the decentralisation of power, no single entity can establish a monopoly of dominance. Instead, people work collectively, and exploitation is eliminated. For Gandhi, a society free from exploitation is the ideal society, for it is in such an environment that Non-violence establishes itself in its full glory. In this state, every individual becomes a seeker of Truth and Non-violence. Thus, it is evident that in Gandhi's view, peace, order, joy, and prosperity can only enter society hand-in-hand with Truth and Non-violence.

Ultimately, for Gandhi, the attainment of Truth is the supreme achievement of life; no matter the circumstances, one must never abandon it. This Truth is discovered through the path of Non-violence—a path defined by love, endurance, and sacrifice. It is a journey that demands the patient bearing of humiliation and suffering, trials so rigorous they often seem insurmountable to the average person. Therefore, those who choose the path of Non-violence must possess an unwavering resolve, immense mental fortitude, and boundless patience.

2. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Gandhi's philosophy offers a powerful vision of a society based on Truth and Non-violence. His idea of Sarvodaya stresses that real progress is possible only when every individual is included in the process of development. By opposing exploitation, centralised power, and social inequality, Gandhi sought to create a cooperative and just social order. He believed that the upliftment of the weak strengthens the whole society. Even though he was not a systematic philosopher, his thoughts continue to guide humanity. In today's world of conflict and inequality, Gandhi's ideals remain deeply relevant and meaningful.

3. REFERENCE

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