

INTRODUCTION

INDIA has tried to follow the principles of Satya and Ahimsa, Truth and Non-violence, through centuries of her past history. The story has been told in another pamphlet published by the World Pacifist Meeting Committee. The actual application has naturally varied from time to time and we find also how it was very successfully employed in the solution of numerous problems relating to personal life or even group-life, where the group was based upon common religious experience.

Gandhiji drew his inspiration from the deep wells of Indian tradition. What he did in addition was to insist upon the application of the age-old method to the problems of modern Indian life; for, according to him, this was the most civilized thing for us to do. Indeed, he wrote:

Some friends have told me that truth and non-violence have no place in politics and worldly affairs. I do not agree. I have no use for them as a means of individual salvation. Their introduction and application in everyday life has been my experiment all along—(*Selections*, 127).*

We have to make truth and non-violence matters not for mere individual practice but for practice by groups and communities and nations. That at any rate is my dream. I shall live and die in trying to realize it. My faith helps me to discover new truths every day. Ahimsa is the attribute of the soul and therefore to be practised by

**Selections from Gandhi, 1948*, Navajivan Press, Ahmedabad. The reference is to the number of the passage.

Studies in Gandhism by the present author is another book which is referred to briefly as *Studies*. There, the reference is to page.

everybody in all the affairs of life. If it cannot be practised in all departments it has no practical value.—(*Selections*, 128).

Self-government depends entirely upon our own internal strength, upon our ability to fight against the heaviest odds. Indeed, self-government which does not require that continuous striving to attain it and to sustain it, is not worth the name. I have therefore endeavoured to show both in word and deed, that political self-government—that is, self-government for a large number of men and women—is no better than individual self-government and, therefore, it is to be attained by precisely the same means that are required for individual self-government or self-rule.—(*Selections*, 139).

Gandhiji also wrote at another time that he was a believer in war, but war which was carried on by means of non-violence. This was as different from 'passive resistance' as the north pole is from the south.

It is the purpose of the present pamphlet to present in outline the high points of Gandhiji's efforts in this direction and thus to show how he tried to fashion a tool of wide-spread social application out of materials that had been lying rusting in the world's private armoury.

Now that Gandhiji is no longer with us, it has become all the more necessary to examine what exactly he stood for. If we are to carry on the brave experiments which were initiated by him, we must know the full meaning of his ideals, as well as acquaint ourselves with the methods by which he tried to realize them.

Gandhiji's aim was to establish non-violence in all spheres of life. He never drew a line between economic, social and political matters nor even between individual and social life. For him, what was good and applicable in private life should be equally applicable in public life. Of course, the method had

to be adapted to the particular situation in which one was working, but he never subscribed to the theory that the rules of public conduct had nothing to do with the rules of private morality.

Some enthusiastic friends once invited him to go to America, in order to tell people about India and his own experiments. But Gandhiji never felt that it was worth while, as long as the method had not proved entirely successful in India, where he had to grapple with problems which demanded an immediate solution if India were to take her due place in the world's life. In India, the principal battle in which he fought as a general, and towards which many eyes were turned from all over the world, was his fight against British Imperialism. This was naturally something in which many countries took keen interest and in which political workers, with a variety of aims, flocked round him when he was leading the Indian National Congress in some severe campaigns of non-violent resistance. But there were other aspects of social life in which he was also the author of powerful movements. The latter naturally failed to evoke the same measure of interest or enthusiasm as the political battles did. But to Gandhiji these other movements were of no less importance than the battle for freedom. He often used to say that unless millions of men in India shed their inertia and became enthusiastic in the task of rebuilding New India's life on the basis of economic and social justice, mere political freedom would prove to be no more than an empty husk.

This interdependence of the economic, social and political aspects of life was an axiom with him and he argued from this that bad methods employed in one sphere of life inevitably led to similar methods else-

where, and eventually to the defeat of one's original purpose. His principal task in life was therefore the introduction of good means in every sphere of life for the attainment of good ends.

We shall now try to indicate, mainly by means of quotations from his published writings, how he endeavoured to create a revolution in various walks of Indian life. For there is no doubt that his life and methods were revolutionary in character. He loved to call himself a revolutionary, but he always qualified the expression by adding that he was a non-violent revolutionary.

I. RELINQUISHING THE FRUITS OF IMPERIALISM

TEN months after the war began in September 1939, Gandhiji wrote an open letter entitled '*To every Briton*'. This was published in the *Harijan* of July 6, 1940. It is reproduced below in full:—

In 1896 I addressed an appeal to every Briton in South Africa on behalf of my countrymen who had gone there as labourers or traders and their assistants. It had its effect. However important it was from my view-point, the cause which I pleaded then was insignificant compared with the cause which prompts this appeal. I appeal to every Briton, wherever he may be now, to accept the method of non-violence instead of war for the adjustment of relations between nations and other matters. Your statesmen have declared that this is a war on behalf of democracy. There are many other reasons given in justification. You know them all by heart. I suggest that at the end of the war, whichever way it ends, there will be no democracy left to represent democracy. This war has descended upon mankind as a curse and a warning. It is a curse inasmuch as it is brutalising man on a scale hitherto unknown. All distinctions between combatants and non-combatants have been abolished. No one and nothing is to be spared. Lying has been reduced to an art. Britain was to defend small nationalities. One by one they have vanished, at least for the time being. It is also a warning. It is a warning that, if nobody reads the writing on the wall, man will be reduced to a state of the beast, whom he is shaming by his manners. I read the writing when the hostilities broke out. But I had not the courage to say the word. God has given me the courage to say it before it is too late.

I appeal for cessation of hostilities, not because you are too exhausted to fight, but because war is bad in

essence. You want to kill Nazism. You will never kill it by its indifferent adoption. Your soldiers are doing the same work of destruction as the Germans. The only difference is that perhaps yours are not as thorough as the Germans. If that be so, yours will soon acquire the same thoroughness as theirs, if not greater. On no other condition can you win the war. In other words, you will have to be more ruthless than the Nazis. No cause, however just, can warrant the indiscriminate slaughter that is going on minute by minute. I suggest that a cause that demands the inhumanities that are being perpetrated to-day cannot be called just.

I do not want Britain to be defeated, nor do I want her to be victorious in a trial of brute strength, whether expressed through the muscle or the brain. Your muscular bravery is an established fact. Need you demonstrate that your brain is also as unrivalled in destructive power as your muscle? I hope you do not wish to enter into such an undignified competition with the Nazis. I venture to present you with a nobler and a braver way, worthy of the bravest soldier. I want you to fight Nazism without arms, or, if I am to retain the military terminology, with non-violent arms. I would like you to lay down the arms you have as being useless for saving you or humanity. You will invite Herr Hitler and Signor Mussolini to take what they want of the countries you call your possessions. Let them take possession of your beautiful island, with your many beautiful buildings. You will give all these, but neither your souls, nor your minds. If these gentlemen choose to occupy your homes, you will vacate them. If they do not give you free passage out, you will allow yourself, man, woman and child, to be slaughtered, but you will refuse to owe allegiance to them.

This process or method, which I have called non-violent non-co-operation, is not without considerable success in its use in India. Your representatives in India may deny the claim. If they do, I shall feel sorry for them. They may tell you that our non-co-operation was not wholly non-violent, that it was born of hatred. If

they give that testimony, I won't deny it. Had it been wholly non-violent, if all the non-co-operators had been filled with goodwill towards you, I make bold to say that you who are India's masters would have become her pupils and, with much greater skill than we have, perfected this matchless weapon and met the German and Italian friends' menace with it. Indeed the history of Europe would have been spared seas of innocent blood, the rape of so many small nations and the orgy of hatred.

This is no appeal made by a man who does not know his business. I have been practising with scientific precision non-violence and its possibilities for an unbroken period of over fifty years. I have applied it in every walk of life, domestic, institutional, economic and political. I know of no single case in which it has failed. Where it has seemed sometimes to have failed, I have ascribed it to my imperfections. I claim no perfection for myself. But I do claim to be a passionate seeker after Truth, which is but another name for God. In the course of that search the discovery of non-violence came to me. Its spread is my life mission. I have no interest in living except for the prosecution of that mission.

I claim to have been a lifelong and wholly disinterested friend of the British people. At one time I used to be also a lover of your empire. I thought that it was doing good to India. When I saw that in the nature of things it could do no good, I used, and am still using, the non-violent method to fight Imperialism. Whatever the ultimate fate of my country, my love for you remains, and will remain, undiminished. My non-violence demands universal love, and you are not a small part of it. It is that love which has prompted my appeal to you.

May God give power to every word of mine. In His name I began to write this, and in His name I close it. May your statesmen have the wisdom and courage to respond to my appeal. I am telling His Excellency the Viceroy that my services are at the disposal of His Majesty's Government, should they consider them of any practical use in advancing the object of my appeal.

Later on, in the *Harijan* of March 15, 1942, Gandhiji published another article entitled '*On its Trial*', in which he dealt with the duty of pacifists in relation to the growing menace which was then facing England. He said:

There is no cause for despondency, much less for denial of one's faith at the crucial moment. Why should not British pacifists stand aside and remodel their life in its entirety? They might be unable to bring about peace outright, but they would lay a solid foundation for it and give the surest test of their faith. When in the face of an upheaval such as we are witnessing there are only a few individuals of immovable faith, they have to live up to their faith even though they may produce no visible effect on the course of events. They should believe that their action will produce tangible results in due course. Their staunchness is bound to attract sceptics. They have to live their lives in strict accord with the Sermon on the Mount, and they will find immediately that there is much to give up and much to remodel. The greatest thing that they have to deny themselves is the fruit of imperialism. The present complicated life of the Londoner and his high living is possible only because of the hoards brought from Asia, Africa and other parts of the world. In spite of the fierce criticism which has been levelled against my letter '*To every Briton*', I adhere to every word of it, and I am convinced that posterity will adopt the remedy suggested therein against violence however organised and fierce.

II. AN ECONOMIC SYSTEM BASED ON NON-VIOLENCE

Bread Labour

As we have said already, Gandhiji always held that Economics and Politics were closely inter-related. If the system of production is based on exploitation or the subordination of one human group to another by means of violence, then such a system can only be defended by violence. War cannot be rooted out as long as the daily life of man is subject to violence. The apparent success of violence in one sphere of life always drives out better methods in other spheres as well. Gresham's law seems to act here with most unfortunate social consequences.

So the first step in rooting out war should be the effort to build up a system of production based on the opposite principle of non-exploitation or non-violence. In one of his post-prayer speeches, Gandhiji defined clearly the fundamental economic doctrine to which he subscribed:

Q. Is it possible to defend by means of non-violence anything which can only be gained through violence?

A. What was gained by violence could not only not be defended by non-violence but the latter requires the abandonment of ill-gotten gains.

Q. Is the accumulation of capital possible except through violence whether open or tacit?

A. Such accumulation by private persons was impossible except through violent means, but accumulation by the State in a non-violent society was not only possible, it was desirable and inevitable.—(*Selections*, 767).

But how is the first step going to be taken? Gandhiji was of the opinion that we should first of all get off the backs of those on whose toils we live, and depend upon productive manual labour carried out in person; for that is the first law of moral life.

The law, that to live man must work, first came home to me upon reading Tolstoy's writing on Bread Labour. But even before that I had begun to pay homage to it after reading Ruskin's *Unto this Last*. The divine law, that man must earn his bread by labouring with his own hands, was first stressed by a Russian writer named T. M. Bondaref. Tolstoy advertised it and gave it wider publicity. In my view, the same principle has been set forth in the third chapter of the *Gita*, where we are told that he who eats without offering sacrifice eats stolen food. Sacrifice here can only mean Bread Labour.

Reason too leads us to an identical conclusion. How can a man who does not do body labour have the right to eat? 'In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat thy bread', says the Bible. More than nine-tenths of humanity lives by tilling the soil. How much happier, healthier and more peaceful would the world become, if the remaining tenth followed the example of the overwhelming majority, at least to the extent of labouring enough for their food! And many hardships, connected with agriculture, would be easily redressed, if such people took a hand in it. Again, invidious distinctions of rank would be abolished, if every one without exception acknowledged the obligation of Bread Labour. There is a world-wide conflict between capital and labour and the poor envy the rich. If all worked for their bread, distinctions of rank would be obliterated, the rich would still be there, but they would deem themselves only trustees of their property, and would use it mainly in the public interest.—(*Selections*, 198).

This was in 1930. In 1935, when a further evolution had taken place in Gandhiji's economic ideas, he wrote:

If all laboured for their bread and no more, then there would be enough food and enough leisure for all. Then there would be no cry of over-population, no disease and no such misery as we see around. Men will no doubt do many other things either through their bodies or through their minds, but all this will be labour of love for the common good. There will then be no rich and no poor, none high and none low, no touchable and no untouchable.

This may be an unattainable ideal. But we need not, therefore, cease to strive for it. Even if, without fulfilling the whole law of sacrifice, that is, the law of our being, we performed physical labour enough for our daily bread, we should go a long way towards the ideal.

May not men earn their bread by intellectual labour? No. The needs of the body must be supplied by the body. "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's" perhaps applies here well. Mere mental, that is, intellectual labour is for the soul and is its own satisfaction. It should never demand payment. In the ideal state, doctors, lawyers and the like will work solely for the benefit of society, not for self. Obedience to the law of Bread Labour will bring about a silent revolution in the structure of society. Man's triumph will consist in substituting the struggle for existence by the struggle for mutual service. The law of the brute will be replaced by the law of man. —(*Selections*, 199).

The question may here be legitimately asked: will this not mean a reversion to the poverty and squalor of the Middle Ages? There were enough spinning wheels in ancient India, but why then did she lose her independence in spite of her universality of handicrafts? Gandhiji defended himself by saying:

— Mediaeval times may have been bad, but I am not prepared to condemn things simply because they are mediaeval. The spinning wheel is undoubtedly mediaeval, but it seems to have come to stay. Though this article is the same, it has become a symbol of freedom and unity as at one time, after the advent of the East India

Company, it had become a symbol of slavery. Modern India has found in it a deeper and truer meaning than our forefathers had dreamt of. Even so, if the handicrafts were once symbols of factory labour, may they now be symbols and vehicles of education in the fullest and truest sense of the term.—(*Selections*, 215).

What he meant was that village self-sufficiency in itself was not enough. When it became coupled with the determination to defend rights without the help of arms, then alone could it ensure steady freedom. But of this, more later.

To a defender of the modern system of production he once replied:

The present distress is undoubtedly insufferable. Pauperism must go. But industrialism is no remedy. The evil does not lie in the use of bullock-carts. It lies in our selfishness and want of consideration for our neighbours. If we have no love for our neighbours, no change, however revolutionary, can do us any good.—(*Selections*, 223).

Decentralisation

But does Gandhi's Bread Labour mean that every man should lead an atomistic life, that we should dissipate all that man has so far gained by the division of labour and by corporate endeavour? His answer was definitely, No. Organisation and interdependence there must be and, if necessary, they should reach world-wide proportions. But what Gandhiji insisted upon is that this interdependence should on no account be based on coercion. It should be of a voluntary character and the co-operating units should all enjoy the same measure of freedom and authority. This is not so under capitalism, and also perhaps under socialism, as it has been brought into being by means of

violence. Both economic and military power in the modern world are unequally distributed, with the result that small states, as well as common people within each state, are reduced to the position of subordinates within federations brought into being by the superior power of the ruling classes of today.

Gandhiji wished first of all to rescue the individual and restore him to an adequate control over his life and destiny, before there could be genuine interdependence and international co-operation. This is the underlying meaning of his insistence upon decentralisation, both in the productive sphere as well as in the matter of social authority. For the sake of adequate human development, every man should be in a position to exercise adequate authority within his own sphere of life, otherwise he might be rendered anaemic in a spiritual sense. In order to give effect to this, a very great development of democratic institutions would be necessary in all branches of social life. Old institutions would have to be recast and new ones framed; the latter might have to be remade again and again, as we learn more and more from their actual working.

Once such institutions, based not on authority but on freedom, functioned for a while and citizens got a taste of their benefit, they would naturally be eager to preserve them by means of their own strength. And all could share in the defence of unaided democratic institutions equally if the means of self-preservation also were democratised. This was possible only through non-violence, as we shall see later on. Violence inevitably tended to concentrate power in a few hands and, by that very process, the repositories of power became external to the masses, and thus no longer fully representative of them.

About Machines

But what place would machines and modern science occupy in the new economic order? Gandhiji has wrongly earned the reputation of being hostile to machinery in all its forms. The reader will however be able to appreciate his exact position in this respect by means of the following extracts from his writings. While answering the questions of an interviewer in 1924, he said:

What I object to, is the *craze* for machinery, not machinery as such. The *craze* is for what they call labour-saving machinery. Men go on 'saving labour', till thousands are without work and thrown on the open streets to die of starvation. I want to save time and labour, not for a fraction of mankind, but for all ; I want concentration of wealth, not in the hands of a few, but in the hands of all. Today machinery merely helps a few to ride on the back of millions. The impetus behind it all is not the philanthropy to save labour, but greed. It is against this constitution of things that I am fighting with all my might.

'Then you are fighting not against machinery as such, but against its abuses which are so much in evidence today'.

I would unhesitatingly say 'yes', but I would add that scientific truths and discoveries should first of all cease to be mere instruments of greed. Then labourers will not be over-worked and machinery, instead of becoming a hindrance, will be a help. I am aiming, not at eradication of all machinery, but limitation.

'When logically argued out, that would seem to imply that all complicated power-driven machinery should go.'

It might have to go, but I must make one thing clear. The supreme consideration is man. The machine should not tend to make atrophied the limbs of man. For instance, I would make intelligent exceptions. Take the case of the Singer Sewing Machine. It is one of the few

useful things ever invented, and there is a romance about the device itself. Singer saw his wife labouring over the tedious process of sewing and seaming with her own hands, and simply out of his love for her he devised the sewing machine in order to save her from unnecessary labour. He, however, saved not only her labour but also the labour of everyone who could purchase a sewing machine.

'But in that case, there would have to be a factory for making these Sewing Machines, and it would have to contain power-driven machinery of ordinary type.'

Yes, but I am socialist enough to say that such factories should be nationalised, or state-controlled. They ought only to be working under the most attractive and ideal conditions, not for profit, but for the benefit of humanity, love taking the place of greed as the motive. It is an alteration in the condition of labour that I want. This mad rush for wealth must cease, and the labourer must be assured, not only of a living wage, but a daily task that is not a mere drudgery. The machine will, under these conditions, be as much a help to the man working it as to the State, or the man who owns it. The present mad rush will cease, and the labourer will work (as I have said) under attractive and ideal conditions. This is but one of the exceptions I have in mind. The Sewing Machine had love at its back. The individual is the one supreme consideration. The saving of labour of the individual should be the object, and honest humanitarian consideration, not greed, the motive. Replace greed by love and everything will come right.—(*Selections*, 230).

Some uninformed interviewer once asked him, 'You are against the Machine Age, I see'. To this Gandhiji immediately replied:

To say that is to caricature my views. I am not against machinery as such, but I am totally opposed to it when it masters us.

Q. You would not industrialise India?

A. I would, indeed, in my sense of the term. The

village communities should be revived. Indian villages produced and supplied to Indian towns and cities all their wants. India became impoverished when our cities became foreign markets and began to drain villages dry by dumping cheap and shoddy goods from foreign lands.

Q. You would then go back to the natural economy.

A. Otherwise, I should go back to the city. I am quite capable of running a big enterprise, but I deliberately sacrificed the ambition, not as a sacrifice, but because my heart rebelled against it. For I should have no share in the spoliation of the nation that is going on from day to day. But I am industrialising the villages in a different way.—(*Studies*, p. 34).

After all, the message of the spinning wheel is that. It is mass-production but mass-production in people's own homes. If you multiply individual production millions of times, would it not give you mass-production on a tremendous scale? I would categorically state my conviction that the mania for mass-production is responsible for the world-crises. Granting for the moment that machinery may supply all the needs of humanity, still it would concentrate production in particular areas, so that you would have to go in a roundabout way to regulate distribution, whereas if there is production and distribution both in the respective areas where things are required, it is automatically regulated and there is less chance for fraud, none for speculation. When production and consumption thus become localised, the temptation to speed up production indefinitely and at any price disappears. All the endless difficulties and problems that our present-day economic system presents, too, would then come to an end. There would be no unnatural accumulation of hoards in the pockets of the few, and want in the midst of plenty in regard to the rest. You see that these nations are able to exploit the so-called weaker or unorganised races of the world. Once these races gain this elementary knowledge and decide that they are no more going to be exploited, they will simply be satisfied with what they can provide themselves. Mass-production, then, at least where the vital necessities are concerned, will disappear.

Q. So you are opposed to machinery only because and when it concentrates production and distribution in the hands of the few?

A. You are right. I hate privilege and monopoly. Whatever cannot be shared with the masses is taboo to me. That is all.—(*Studies*, p. 35).

The Theory of Trusteeship

A very important question has to be discussed in this connection. What were Gandhiji's ideas with regard to the institution of private property? In other words, what should be the shape of things in a society ruled by non-violence?

It should be pointed out that Gandhiji held varying views on this subject. Sometimes this was dictated by the fact that he did not apply his mind to all possible aspects of the question at the very start. As new problems arose from time to time, he developed new solutions and his theoretical position consequently underwent some amount of modification.

Gandhiji held certain very definite views with regard to Possession vis-a-vis Non-violence and the following passages will serve as fair samples of his ideas on the subject:

If we are to be non-violent, we must then not wish for anything on this earth which the meanest or the lowest of human beings cannot have.—(*Selections*, 48).

Love and exclusive possession can never go together. Theoretically when there is perfect love, there must be perfect non-possession. The body is our last possession. So a man can only exercise perfect love, and be completely dispossessed if he is prepared to embrace death and renounces his body for the sake of human service.

But that is true in theory only. In actual life, we can hardly exercise perfect love, for the body as a possession will always remain with us. Man will ever remain imper-

fect and it will always be his part to try to be perfect. So that perfection in love or non-possession will remain an unattainable ideal as long as we are alive, but towards which we must ceaselessly strive.—(*Selections*, 51).

Some interviewers once asked for his opinion about the Bolshevik ideal and in course of the answer, he clearly explained where the points of agreement or of difference lay between the two. A report of this interview was published in the *Young India* of 15.11.28.

Q. What is your opinion about the social economics of Bolshevism and how far do you think they are fit to be copied by our country?

A. I must confess that I have not yet been able fully to understand the meaning of Bolshevism. All that I know is that it aims at the abolition of the institution of private property. This is only an application of the ethical ideal of non-possession in the realm of economics and if people adopted this idea of their own accord or could be made to accept it by means of peaceful persuasion, there would be nothing like it. But from what I know of Bolshevism it not only does not preclude the use of force but freely sanctions it for the expropriation of private property and for maintaining the collective state ownership of the same. And if that is so I have no hesitation in saying that the Bolshevik regime in its present form cannot last for long. For it is my firm conviction that nothing enduring can be built on violence. But be that as it may there is no questioning the fact that the Bolshevik ideal has behind it the purest sacrifice of countless men and women who have given up their all for its sake, and an ideal that is sanctified by the sacrifices of such master spirits as Lenin cannot go in vain; the noble example of their renunciation will be emblazoned for ever and quicken and purify the ideal as time passes.—(*Selections*, 263).

But what is this Theory of Trusteeship to which Gandhiji refers again and again and how does he pro-

pose to find a substitute for class-war which is becoming more and more urgent in one form or another in all countries of the world today? The second part of the problem will be taken up in the following chapter. We shall therefore confine ourselves to the basic implications of his Theory of Trusteeship.

Personally, Gandhiji was not in favour of inheritance of wealth, and positively in favour of turning every man into a willing body-labourer; yet he did not desire to force such a condition upon society by means of violence. He wished people of wealth to turn themselves of their own accord to the position when they took nothing beyond an earned commission for their labours, holding their material as well as moral or intellectual wealth as trust-property on behalf of society. But if they did not do so themselves, those on whom the privileged classes depended for the making or retention of their wealth could go ahead without waiting for the former to convert themselves; and by means of their self-suffering, as expressed through non-violent non-co-operation, they could undertake the task of converting the privileged classes into willing and happy supporters of the new order, in which there was to be no exploitation, and all material and moral wealth was to be held in common and used for furthering the cause of the good of all.

Readers who might be interested in the details of this theory are referred to Gandhiji's own writings on the subject, or studies which others have undertaken on his economic theories. In brief, Gandhiji envisaged that the new social order would be brought into being by the joint endeavour of today's mutually hostile classes, and that all men will live as servants of the community through a complete re-assessment of life's

values. Through economic equality, untarnished by the laws of inheritance prevalent today, society would secure for every man full opportunity for the development of his physical, mental and moral powers, without allowing him to restrict similar opportunity for others. And the product of those talents would be shared by all in common.

III. SATYAGRAHA, THE NON-VIOLENT MEANS OF REVOLUTION

Passive Resistance versus Satyagraha

It is necessary at the outset to point out that Gandhiji drew a clear distinction between passive resistance and Satyagraha. Although the struggle in South Africa was called passive resistance in its early stages, he dropped the expression later on and employed the newly coined term Satyagraha instead. He kept the term passive resistance for a form of resistance in which the intention was still to punish or harass the enemy, but where arms were not employed for one reason or another. The restraint did not arise from any feeling of respect for the humanity of the antagonist, or from the intention of converting him by means of self-suffering.

The fundamental fact about Satyagraha is that it aims at converting the opponent to views other than those held by him under the influence of selfishness or pride. In war also, there is conversion. But the conversion being achieved through fear, by means of punishment or the threat of punishment, it degrades the defeated party, with unhappy psychological reactions among the victors as well as the vanquished. The advantage gained by victory is very often set at naught by the evil effects which follow in the train of war itself.

The conversion which the Satyagrahi aims at is of a completely different order. He employs the most heroic forms of direct action, draws all punishment

upon himself, and thus hopes to capture the imagination of the opponent by surprise; when the door is likely to be opened for human reconciliation on a higher plane.

The Responsibility rests with the Have-nots

In 1940, Gandhiji wrote :

If, in spite of the utmost effort, the rich do not become guardians of the poor in the true sense of the term and the latter are more and more crushed and die of hunger, what is to be done? In trying to find out the solution of this riddle I have lighted on non-violent non-co-operation and civil disobedience as the right and infallible means. The rich cannot accumulate wealth without the co-operation of the poor in society. If this knowledge were to penetrate to and spread among the poor, they would become strong and would learn how to free themselves by means of non-violence from the crushing inequalities which have brought them to the verge of starvation.— (*Selections*, 256).

As President of the Kathiawad Political Conference in 1924, he said :

The popular saying, as is the king so are the people, is only a half-truth. That is to say, it is not more true than its converse, as are the people, so is the prince. Where the subjects are watchful a prince is entirely dependent on them for his status. Where the subjects are overtaken by sleepy indifference, there is every possibility that the prince will cease to function as a protector and become an oppressor instead. Those who are not wide awake have no right to blame their prince. The princes as well as the people are mostly creatures of circumstance. Enterprising princes and peoples mould circumstances for their own benefit. Manliness consists in making circumstances subservient to ourselves. Those who will not heed themselves perish. To understand this principle is not to be impatient, not to reproach Fate, not to blame others. He

who understands the doctrine of self-help blames himself for failure. It is on this ground that I object to violence. If we blame others where we should blame ourselves and wish for or bring about their destruction, that does not remove the root cause of the disease which on the contrary sinks all the deeper for the ignorance thereof. —(*Studies*, p. 93).

Respect for Human Personality

Ten years afterwards, he wrote again:

It is because the rulers, if they are bad, are so, not necessarily or wholly by birth, but largely because of their environment, that I have hopes of their altering their course. It is perfectly true that the rulers cannot alter their course themselves. If they are dominated by their environment, they do not surely deserve to be killed, but should be changed by a change in environment. But the environment is us—the people who make the rulers what they are. They are thus an exaggerated edition of what we are in the aggregate. If my argument is sound, any violence done to the rulers would be violence done to ourselves. It would be suicide. And since I do not want to commit suicide, nor encourage my neighbours to do so, I become non-violent myself and invite my neighbours to do likewise.

Moreover, violence may destroy one or more bad rulers, but, like Ravana's heads, others will pop up in their places, for the root lies elsewhere. It lies in us. If we reform ourselves, the rulers will automatically do so.

The correspondent seems to imagine that a non-violent person has no feelings and that he is a silent witness to the 'slow sucking of blood going on every day in the world'. Non-violence is not a passive force nor so helpless as the correspondent will make it out to be. Barring truth, if truth is to be considered apart from non-violence, the latter is the activist force in the world. It never fails. Violence only seemingly succeeds and nobody has ever claimed uniform success for violence. Non-violence never promises

immediate and tangible results. It is not a mango trick. Its failures are therefore all seeming. A believer in violence will kill the murderer and boast of his act. But he never killed murder. By murdering the murderer, he added to it and probably invited more. The law of retaliation is the law of multiplying evil.—(*Studies*, p. 94).

Exploitation of the poor can be extinguished not by effecting the destruction of a few millionaires, but by removing the ignorance of the poor and teaching them to non-co-operate with their exploiters. That will convert the exploiters also.—(*Studies*, p. 12).

The idea behind non-violent non-co-operation is not to oust the present rulers from power either by violence or passive resistance but to convert them by means of self-suffering, so that they would ultimately join hands with their erstwhile victims in building up a new economic and social system based on freedom and equality. In Satyagraha, the personality of the exploiter is given due respect; a successful termination of the battle does not leave either the stigma of defeat or the pride of conquest. It thus blesses him who uses it, and also him against whom it is used. And, on the whole, it makes for the establishment of a more stable social order than can be brought about by violent means.

But can depraved human nature be set right by the method of love? In poetic language, Gandhiji once wrote:

When I was a little child, there used to be two blind performers in Rajkot. One of them was a musician. When he played on his instrument, his fingers swept the strings with an unerring instinct and everybody listened spell-bound to his playing. Similarly there are chords in every human heart. If we only know how to strike the right chord, we bring out the music.—(*Studies*, p. 11).

Non-violence and Democracy

There is another reason why the method of non-violence seems to be superior to that of violence.

Each of us has his own opinion regarding the course of human history, as well as of the role played in it by various factors. Others may entertain different views, which may be logically equally admissible; only the premises of one will be different from the premises of the other. But if each of us thinks that he has reached nearest the truth, and considers that this gives him the authority to punish others for their different opinions, then there will be no end of trouble in a mad world. The proof of whether one is right or wrong will lie in one's power to inflict punishment or suffering on others and this, as we can all feel, is the poorest way of proving the rightness of one's own case.

Naturally, no man can live without his own opinions; and the most decent way of convincing others of the correctness of one's own position is by converting an opponent by means of gentleness instead of coercing him into submission. In the propagation of truth, it would therefore be wrong to inflict punishment on others, but it would surely be right to suffer in one's own person for a course of action which one holds to be right. Self-suffering becomes a guarantee of the sincerity of one's own opinions.

This method has the additional merit of helping us to correct ourselves if we happen to be in the wrong. If suffering is limited to our own side, we do not rush to propagate half-tested truths. Such suffering, when willingly and joyfully borne, burns up within us the sources of personal error which give a wrong turn to

our opinions. We have, at the same time, the additional satisfaction of feeling that we have injured none but ourselves for what we hold to be right. This preserves a comradely feeling towards other human beings, as well as a respect for partial views of truth other than our own.

The non-violent way is thus the way of democracy. Democracy can never be spread by the infliction of punishment on others, however distasteful and injurious their ideas may appear to us. Self-suffering also brings the power of spreading one's own opinions by actually living them, which is within the reach of even the physically weakest man. In Gandhiji's own words :

True democracy or the swaraj of the masses can never come through untruthful and violept means, for the simple reason that the natural corollary to their use would be to remove all opposition through the suppression or extermination of the antagonist. That does not make for individual freedom. Individual freedom can have the fullest play under a regime of unadulterated *ahimsa* (or non-violence).—(*Studies*, p. 15).

While violence is directed towards the injury, including the destruction, of the aggressor, and is successful only when it is stronger than that of the opponent, non-violent action can be taken in respect of an opponent however powerfully organised for violence. Violence *per se* of the weak has never been known to succeed against the stronger in violence. Success of non-violent action of the very weak is a daily occurrence.—(*Studies*, p. 15).

Indeed the weakest State can render itself immune from attack if it learns the art of non-violence. But a small State, no matter how powerfully armed it is, cannot exist in the midst of a powerful combination of well-armed States. It has to be absorbed or be under the protection of one of the members of such a combination.—(*Studies*, p. 16.)

India's Struggle for Independence under Gandhiji's Leadership

It was Gandhiji's firm belief that if we wish to replace war by the method of Satyagraha, the endeavour has to be backed by a *corresponding effort to replace the present economic structure based on violence by one whose foundation is laid upon co-operation and the absence of all forms of exploitation.* As a practical idealist, he also knew that the latter endeavour could never reach full fruition until the political forces working against it were liquidated at the same time. This was the reason why his 'Constructive Programme' and Satyagraha went hand in hand as two complementary parts of one whole.

During the last twenty-five years or so, Gandhiji tried to build up numerous voluntary organisations to carry on the Constructive Programme. Chief among these, and the first in point of origin, was the All India Spinners' Association. This Association covered the whole of India by a network of centres and handled large sums of money in order to promote the idea of self-sufficiency of the villages with regard to one of the primary requirements of life. The Association has passed through many phases in its career. It has however always been maintained on a voluntary footing. But during the last stages of its history it has gradually given up what little centralised direction there was in it and has now practically become converted into a body where workers gather for expert technical advice, or for exchanging their experiences from time to time.

There has been a lowering of production and also of efficiency in certain branches. But perhaps this

has been due more to the prevailing atmosphere of the country than to the failure of the idea of decentralisation itself. The measure of self-sufficiency, or the amount of activity in village units, which Gandhiji wanted to build up through the Constructive Programme, did not reach the point Gandhiji wished for it. Workers who gathered round him often pursued the village-uplift programme as a means of coming into contact with the rural population and thus preparing them for non-co-operation for political purposes, rather than as an economic end in itself. The apparent failure of the Programme does not therefore seriously dishearten us. Now that India is free and centralised production or distribution is somehow found unable to meet the present crisis, there may be a more genuine effort in the direction of decentralisation, which at least logically promises to bring relief to the common man in the rural areas.

Similarly with regard to non-violence and Satyagraha, the experiences of India in the field of collective action have not yielded the anticipated results.

All through the struggle for Indian Independence, Gandhiji personally maintained the correct attitude of the Satyagrahi towards the British opponents. He always trusted them to do the right. But not all those who followed him pretended to 'love the enemy', a sentiment which he wished them to develop. Many of those who non-co-operated maintained a stolid indifference towards the British, refusing to punish them no doubt because that was part of the discipline; but there was little faith among them that the heart of the rulers would change. Yet they followed Gandhi, because non-co-operation called them to a brave adventure and there was the belief that the wheels of

the chariot of Empire could, at least, be brought to a dead stop by its means. There was violence in the mind and very naturally so. But the surprising part of it was that, on the whole, there was so little of it, considering the number of men involved and also what India had gone through in recent times at the hands of the imperial rulers.

Gandhiji held the leashes in his hand and when there was an outburst of violence after the people had been goaded into breaking the commander's discipline, he tried to restrain the masses by his determination to immolate himself by means of a fast, a method which had immense influence over those who loved or respected him.

When, after nearly two centuries, the end of British rule came on the 15th of August, 1947, Gandhiji did not feel very happy. The British had capitulated even before we had earned self-rule in terms of the millions, by means of Constructive Work and Satyagraha, i.e., a due fulfilment of the programme of non-violence in the field of economics and of politics. The apparent non-violence of the Indian nation was discovered by its leader to have been 'non-violence of the weak' and not 'non-violence of the brave', for the intention to punish or obstruct was there and not the intention to convert. This was expressed in a very remarkable manner by Gandhiji in the course of two interviews in the year 1947.

In July, at Delhi, he said, "I have admitted my mistake, I thought our struggle was based on non-violence, whereas in reality it was no more than passive resistance. It leads naturally to armed resistance whenever possible."

Then he continued to tell how in South Africa the English Chairman of his meeting had said that he (Gandhiji) was fighting for the cause of the weak. Therefore he was resorting to passive resistance. Gandhiji had contradicted the statement. He had said that they were not weak in the sense the Chairman meant. The struggle in the Transvaal was not passive resistance. It was based on non-violence. The source of their strength was soul-force, not physical force.

Intoxicated with his success in South Africa he came to India. Here too the struggle bore fruit. But he now realised that it was not based on non-violence. If he had known so then, he would not have launched the struggle. But God wanted to take that work from him, so he blurred his vision. It was because their struggle was not non-violent that they today witnessed loot, arson and murder.

A friend interposed that Gandhiji had always maintained that our struggle was based on non-violence, though of the weak.

Gandhiji said that his was a mistaken statement. There was no such thing as non-violence of the weak. Non-violence and weakness was a contradiction in terms. He had never experienced the dark despair that was today within him. He was a born fighter who did not know failure. But he was groping today.

"But why should you feel despondent?" persisted the friend. "I see clearly," replied Gandhiji, "that if the country cannot be turned to non-violence it will be bad for it and the world. It will mean good-bye to freedom. It might even mean a military dictatorship. I am day and night thinking how non-violence of the brave can be cultivated.

"I said at the Asiatic Conference that I hoped that the fragrance of the non-violence of India would permeate the whole world. I often wonder if that hope will materialise."—(*Harijan*, 27.7.47, p. 253.)

A similar sentiment was expressed in the course of his interview with Professor Stuart Nelson when the latter asked him why it was that Indians who had more or less successfully gained Independence through peaceful means, were now unable to check the tide of civil war through the same means? Gandhiji replied that it was indeed a searching question which he must answer. He confessed that it had become clear to him that what he had mistaken for Satyagraha was not Satyagraha but passive resistance,—a weapon of the weak. Indians harboured ill-will and anger against their erstwhile rulers, while they pretended to resist them non-violently. Their resistance was therefore inspired by violence and not by regard for the man in the British, whom they should convert through Satyagraha.

Now that the British were voluntarily quitting India, our apparent non-violence had gone to pieces in a moment. The attitude of violence which we had secretly harboured, in spite of the restraint imposed by the Indian National Congress, now recoiled upon us and made us fly at each other's throats when the question of the distribution of power came up. If India could now discover a way of sublimating the force of violence, which had taken a communal turn, leading it into constructive peaceful ways whereby differences of interest could be liquidated, it would be a great thing indeed.

Gandhiji then proceeded to say that it was true that many English friends had warned him that the so-called

non-violent non-co-operation of India was not really non-violent. It was the passivity of the weak and not the non-violence of the stout in heart who would never surrender their sense of human unity and brotherhood even in the midst of conflict of interests, who would *ever try to convert and not coerce their adversary.*

Gandhiji proceeded to say that this was indeed true. He had all along laboured under an illusion. But he was never sorry for it. He realised that if his vision had not been covered by that illusion, India would never have reached the point that it actually had succeeded in reaching today.

India was now free and the reality was now clearly revealed to him. Now that the burden of subjection had been lifted, all the forces of good had to be marshalled in one supreme effort to build a country which forsook the accustomed method of violence in order to settle human conflicts, whether it was between *two States or between two sections of the same people.* He had yet the faith that India would rise to the occasion and prove to the world that the birth of two new States would be, not a menace, but a blessing to the rest of mankind. It was the duty of Free India to perfect the instrument of non-violence for dissolving collective conflicts, if its freedom were going to be really worthwhile.

IV. EXPERIMENTING WITH NON-VIOLENCE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

THE reader will thus observe how Gandhiji's collective efforts to establish an economic ideal as well as a method of direct action based upon non-violence have worked themselves out in India. Indeed his life itself was of the nature of a great experiment and perhaps the greatest experiment undertaken by him was initiated in Bengal after the communal riots broke out there during the latter part of 1946. Gandhiji himself felt that this was the "last act of his life" when his non-violence itself was on supreme trial.

In October 1946, the Muslim peasants in Noakhali in the south-eastern corner of Bengal, rose in rebellion against the land-owning and middle-class Hindu inhabitants. The poor labouring classes of Hindus were also not spared and altogether nearly three hundred people were murdered, while several thousand homesteads were looted and burnt. But the worst feature of the disturbances was that a little less than a hundred thousand Hindus either fled their homes or were forced to embrace Islam. If anyone changed his religion after due study and from conviction, Gandhiji naturally respected him. But what he could not endure was changing one's faith for fear of life or property. When that happened, it meant, according to him, that the man had become irreligious; for no true religion could be reared upon any foundation other than fearlessness, i.e., upon the preparedness to lay down one's life for a cherished belief.

When Gandhiji reached Noakhali three weeks after the news was first permitted to appear in the Press, he set before himself a stupendous task. Here were a number of his own countrymen gone mad. They had oppressed a minority professing a different religion until the latter had been forced to part with their creed. The oppressed now looked up to the Government for protection of life and property as well as for their right of religious worship. In other words, their final reliance was upon arms for the protection of their civic rights. This was a position from which Gandhiji wanted to rescue them.

He started on a tour on foot through the districts of Noakhali and Tipperah, a pilgrimage as he called it, imploring men to shed fear and to lay down their lives without taking that of others, in defence of their freedom of belief. He said that this was the only condition under which the Hindus could live in Noakhali in the midst of a population professing a different religion, and who denied them that freedom. His mission was to live, unprotected by the police or the military, in the midst of a population which considered him as their arch-enemy, until he could convert his erring brethren into religious toleration. His daily life was going to be one of humble service, but it was to be lighted by the public prayers where he exercised his right of religious freedom.

In Gandhiji's own words, this was the most difficult mission of his life, the mission in which he had determined to convert the erring Muslim peasant from his intolerance by service and suffering, and Hindus from fear of life and property by the example of his courage and his dedication to the humble service of the common villager. He would make one supreme

effort to wean humanity from the degradation which it had reached by reliance upon violence. For both oppression and cowardice, with its attendant faith upon arms for the sake of killing or for protection, were the obverse and the reverse of the coin of violence. This was the task he set before himself and, at the same time, he was determined to die in the endeavour to fulfil it. That is why he used to refer to his work as the 'Do or die' mission.

In Noakhali as well as in Calcutta, later on, Gandhiji's efforts were marked by considerable success. But the poison of communalism which had led the Muslim League to various forms of 'direct action' and ultimately to the demand of partition of India, had succeeded in rousing an equal feeling of communalism among the Hindus of India, who had so long worked under a feeling of nationalism. This evil fire scorched the growing plant of nationalism and the result was that the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League ultimately came to an agreement to partition India into two independent States. It was then that Gandhiji made one supreme effort to settle down in what had become Pakistan and turn it into a country where complete freedom of worship was guaranteed, not merely in law but in actual practice as well. He also worked so that the residual Muslim population of the Indian Union might be guaranteed complete equality of rights with the rest of the people, and a feeling of loyalty to the State might take the place of the prevailing loyalty to separate communal interests. This might set up a healthy reaction in the State of Pakistan as well. In all this endeavour, he was gravely misunderstood and condemned for his partiality to the Muslims. Eventually this led to his assassination

at the hands of one who thought he was serving the cause of Hinduism by his deed.

Gandhiji thus laid down his life in his last and greatest mission. But in that journey a feeling of loneliness gradually crept over him and he functioned, not through the Indian National Congress, as he had uniformly done when the fight for independence was on, but in his personal capacity. Personally he gained immensely in stature, but India as a whole lost to the same extent, except for what came back by way of reflected glory.

We do not know what path the Indian nation will follow now, whether it will dare to tread the path through which alone we believe civilisation can fulfil itself. But even if it does not, Gandhiji's life and the history of the collective experiments undertaken on the Indian soil under his guidance or inspiration are there before the whole world and all can profit by them. For those, however, who believe in the universal applicability of non-violence, the path is absolutely clear. They have to live in accordance with their belief, adapting the method of non-violence to solve problems which today are tackled by violence. This may mean the attempt in experimental areas to build up a system of decentralised production and distribution. The free State of India will also have to play its part in this process of decentralisation, or building up democracy from the bottom. Naturally, the standard of material comforts thus reached will not be high until the units federate voluntarily to raise the standard through free co-operation. What is more important however is that wherever conflicts occur, between one human group and another, or between the citizen and the State, believers in non-violence must

take up the challenge and devise some means of converting the hostile units through Satyagraha until justice reigns supreme.

All his life, Gandhiji lived as a fighter and his advice was not to wait, but to carry the battle into the enemy's camp. If his life failed to destroy our inertia and rescue us from our lack of self-confidence, let his death at least not go in vain.