

SATYAGRAHA: The Art of Defying Oppression Without Becoming OppressorsDevi Prasad

To begin with I shall discuss some of the commonly used terms in connection with nonviolent action against oppression, and which are often mistakenly understood to be the same as satyagraha practiced and advocated by Gandhi. This is to try to point out the differences between the concepts these terms represent and how they are not quite the same as the concept of Satyagraha. These terms are passive resistance, non-cooperation, direct action, civil disobedience and non-resistance.

My aim is not to minimise, even to the slightest degree, the merits, uses and strength of these methods, but to point out that in contrast to any of them Satyagraha is a complete philosophy, as well as the technique of fundamental social change. Whereas the philosophy of Satyagraha implies a wholistic approach to both long term as well as immediate issues facing human kind, the practice of the above mentioned concepts is by definition, limited to particular situations without being necessarily related to other social or political problems.

Passive Resistance: Often times Gandhi himself has used this phrase to denote what he meant by satyagraha. Nevertheless, he has been careful enough to make a clear distinction between the two concepts. "Passive resistance", he wrote in 1924, "is the weapon of the weak... The result of our using the phrase 'passive resistance' in South Africa," he continues "was, not that people admired us by ascribing to us the bravery and the self-sacrifice of the Suffragists, but we were mistaken to be a danger to person and property, which the Suffragists were, and even a generous friend like Mr Hosken imagined us to be weak. The power of suggestion is such, that a man at last becomes what he believes himself to be. If we continue to believe ourselves and let others believe, that we are weak and helpless and therefore offer passive resistance, our resistance would never make us strong, and at the earliest opportunity we would give up passive resistance as a weapon of the weak... While in passive resistance there is a scope for the use of arms when the suitable occasion arises, in Satyagraha physical force is forbidden even in the so-called most favourable circumstances. passive resistance is often looked upon as a preparation for the use of force while Satyagraha can never be utilised as such". (1)

In passive resistance there is often an effort of harassing the other party along with a simultaneous readiness to undergo any hardship entailed upon by such activity; whereas in Satyagraha there is not the remotest idea of harassing or shaming the opponent. Although passive resistance implies a tremendous endurance of suffering, it does not imply much of creative perspective. In it love is not a necessary ingredient, while it is the soul force behind Satyagraha, which also equips the resister with a more effective and powerful weapon.

To illustrate this point, the example of the sacrifice of the Arabs at the time of the Moroccan War would be an appropriate one. The French artillery, many times more powerful than the armed Arabs, was ordered to fire on them, but the Arabs defied death, threw away their arms, and shouting "Allah! Allah!" rushed towards the firing canons of the French. The French gunners were so overcome by the bravery shown by the Moroccans that they declined to fire their guns, and cheering threw up their caps and embraced the Arabs. The Arabs were fighting for their religion and were prepared to face death in frenzy. However, there was not any spirit of love in their action. Gandhi once gave this as an example for the Indian Congress men to emulate, as far as the Arabs determination to even die for their cause was concerned, but he called it 'reckless bravery'. (2) The occasion was the hoisting of the national flag at a Congress meeting. The flag for him was "a mere piece of cloth", unless it symbolised - and turned that symbol into reality - the ideals behind their struggle for independence.

Gandhi sometimes used the phrase passive resistance because that was the only phrase in the English language that, he felt came nearest to the meaning of Satyagraha. He was also clear in his mind that what goes under the name of Satyagraha was not all real Satyagraha, as not everything that is called by the name of passive resistance should necessarily be different from Satyagraha. While drawing the distinction between the two concepts, he wrote, "... I do not wish to suggest that the merits, or if you like, the defects of passive resistance ... are to be seen in every movement that passes by that name, but it can be shown that these defects have been noticed in many cases of passive resistance. Jesus Christ indeed has been acclaimed as the prince of passive resisters, but I submit in that case passive resistance must mean satyagraha and satyagraha alone. There are not many cases in history of passive resistance in that sense ...." (3)

The adjective passive given to a resister like Jesus was a misnomer. He was the most active resister known in history. His was nonviolence per excellence. (4) There is no denial of the fact that passive resistance has often succeeded in the past in achieving its goals, but it is also true that more often than not it has been used in *desperation and helplessness* and also, that nonviolence has not been a necessary component of passive resistance. According to Gandhi Satyagraha differs from Passive Resistance as the North Pole from the South. The later has been conceived as a weapon of the weak and does not exclude the use of physical force or violence for the purpose of gaining one's end; whereas the former has been conceived as a weapon of the strongest and excludes the use of violence in any shape or form.

Non-resistance: It is the old christian concept derived from Christ's commandment "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also". (5) Gandhi called it nonviolence per excellence, and yet he could not find the phrase non-resistance to be adequate for the new principle that had come into being as a result of the nonviolent struggle of the Indians in South Africa. Despite the concept being the original Christian non-resistance taught and exemplified by Jesus Christ, and used so very often as a commandment for every Christian, it has not only been misunderstood, but misused, especially to induce non-action when action was necessary against injustice.

Adin Ballou (1803-1890), the founder of the Utopian Hopedale Community in 1841, who was also president of the New England Non-Resistance Society made an inventory of "don'ts" for a Christian non-resistant. He cannot kill, cannot be a member of any voluntary association which holds as fundamental truth and as sound doctrine - war, capital punishment. He cannot be an officer or chaplain in the army, navy or militia of any nation; an officer or pledged supporter of any government whose civil constitution require or even tolerates war, slavery and inflicting of personal injury. Ballou emphasises that the doctrine does not go against all religion, government, etc, but "... it goes only against such religion, government, social organisation, constitution, laws, order, rules,

regulations and restraints as are unequivocally contrary to the law of Christ, as are sanction for taking life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, as are based on the assumption that it is right to resist injury with injury, evil with evil."(6)

Despite such an explanation given by an authority like Billou the phrase non-resistance did not satisfy Gandhi as adequate enough to be used to explain what he exactly meant by Satyagraha. In a post-prayer meeting he once said, "... the true meaning of non-resistance had often been misunderstood or even distorted. It never implied that a nonviolent man should bend before the violence of an aggressor. While not returning the latter's violence by violence, he should refuse to submit to the latter's illegitimate demand even to the point of death. That was the true meaning of non-resistance." (7) In an answer to a question whether he had taken these principles from Tolstoy, Gandhi said, "I derived the greatest benefit from his writings, but, as Tolstoy himself admitted, I cultivated and developed and elaborated the method in South Africa, so much so, that it looked quite different from the non-resistance that Tolstoy had written about and recommended". (8) Needless to say that to a serious non-christian student of nonviolence, the phrase non-resistance sounds non-action and associated with cowardice, especially as it is seen in practice that in the name of non-resistance so much exploitation goes on in the world.

#### Direct Action

Direct action can come very near to Satyagraha. It can be against any wrong done by an individual or group, or a social or political evil. It can be organised for building new patterns of behaviour and relationships. However, the term seems to be incomplete and open ended. A person with a gun responding to a situation is also taking direct action. It comes closer to Satyagraha only if the adjective non-violent is added before it, i.e. making it non-violent direct action. Whenever Gandhi used the phrase - which he very often did - he meant it to be nonviolent direct action. When a friend wrote to him that direct action does not work for unity Gandhi replied "... Never has anything been done on this earth without direct action. I rejected the word 'passive resistance', because of its

insufficiency and its being interpreted as a weapon of the weak. It was direct action in South Africa which told and told so effectively that it converted General Smutts to sanity ... But what is more, direct action sustained for eight years left behind it not only no bitterness, but the very Indians who put up such a stubborn fight against General Smutts, ranged themselves round his banner in 1915 and fought under him in East Africa. It was direct action in Champaran\* which removed an age-long grievance. A meek submission when one is chafing under a disability or a grievance which one would gladly see removed, not only does not make for unity, but makes the weak party acid, angry and prepares him for an opportunity to explode. By allying myself with the weak party, by teaching him direct, firm, but harmless action, I make him feel strong and capable of defying the physical might. He feels braced for the struggle, regains confidence in himself and knowing that the remedy lies with himself, ceases to harbour the spirit of revenge and learns to be satisfied with a redress of the wrong he is seeking to remedy".(9)

In the same Young India article, Gandhi gave examples from Buddha's and Christ's lives. "... Buddha fearlessly carried the war into the enemy's camp and brought down on its knees an arrogant priesthood. Christ drove out the money changers from the temple of Jerusalem and drew down curses from Heaven, upon the hypocrites and the Pharisees. Both were for intensely direct action, but even as Buddha and Christ chastised they showed unmistakable gentleness and love behind every act of theirs. They would not raise a finger against their enemies, but would gladly surrender themselves rather than the truth for which they lived ... And if I raise resistance of a nonviolent character I simply and humbly follow in the footsteps of the great teachers named by my critic\*\*." (10)

It is sufficiently clear that while writing the above note, Gandhi had his concept of Satyagraha in his mind. He was using direct action as a synonym of Satyagraha. The term direct action per se can be and is used by all activists, whether using physical force or any other force. It is generally against something, and at the same time for building new relationships. Unlike direct action Satyagraha is never negative. We shall come back to this point later, but the point I want to make here is that while direct action is a part of Satyagraha, it is not Satyagraha and the two phrases are not interchangeable.

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\* A Satyagraha campaign of 1916. It will be briefly discussed later.

\*\* Gandhi did not give the name of the person in reply to whose letter he wrote the article.

Non-cooperation

A government cannot run smoothly without the cooperation of those over whom it rules. The corollary of this principle, therefore, will be that the ruled, if they want and decide, this can make the running of the government difficult by withdrawing their cooperation. In other words withdrawal of cooperation i.e. non-cooperation can be an effective weapon in the hands of the disgruntled or dissatisfied people. In fact non-cooperation has been used on a large scale since the emergence of the trade union movement in the form of strikes, and lately as sit-ins and other similar methods. The word strike to mean stoppage of work as a method of protest has been in currency since the beginning of the 19th Century.

Non-cooperation in the form of boycott has also been popular in matters of both industrial as well as social relations, since long before the word came into being in 1880 in Ireland. It is a kind of direct action and does not necessarily imply that it should be either violent or non-violent. In the Indian tradition, however, as Gandhi indicated in Hind Swaraj, "The fact is that, in India, the nation at large has generally used passive resistance in all departments of life. We cease to cooperate with our rulers when they displease us." (11) Under Gandhi's leadership of the Indian independence movement the technique of noncooperation accompanied with a commitment to nonviolence, and not to resort to any physical force come what may. The reason for keeping the struggle nonviolent was that it was much more than a freedom fight against the British; it was meant to be a process of changing attitudes of both the parties, freedom fighters as well as the rulers. The aims of the nonviolent freedom struggle went even further. Its objective was to build a new India, an India which would eventually pave the way to a warless world. Gandhi elaborates the point:

"My conception of Ramarajya (ideal government) excludes replacement of the British army by a national army of occupation. A country that is governed by even its national army can never be morally free and, therefore, its so-called weakest member can never rise to his full moral height".

"India will have to decide whether attempting to become a military power she would be content to become, at least for some years, a fifth-rate power in

the world without message in answer to the pessimian or whether she will by further refining and continuing her nonviolent policy prove herself worthy of being the first nation in the world using her hard-won freedom for the delivery of the earth from the burden which is crushing her inspite of the so-called victory" (12)

Non-cooperation without nonviolence, therefore cannot be the way to a world without war. It will eventually either be frustrated and defeated, or it will manifest itself into violence. Without a commitment to nonviolence, non-cooperation surely has no potential for going beyond resolving the immediate conflict for which it is organised. Whenever Gandhi used the term non-cooperation, he implied or took foregranted that the adjective "nonviolent" was part of the non-cooperation that he advocated. It therefore is clear that the term non-cooperation as itself did not, could not, be equivalent to Satyagraha.

#### Civil Disobedience

Civil Disobedience, comes closest to Satyagraha. Henry David Thoreau's civil disobedience was not only a refusal to the governments supposed authority to interfere with individual liberty, or as he himself wrote, "What I have to do is to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn". (13)

Thoreau's most profound contribution, in addition to his principle of civil disobedience, was that he did not only reject a law, but also, by his own action, presented an alternative life style. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Thoreau's action was to a great extent, limited to the revenue law - payment of taxes. In general, however, civil disobedience is understood to be an act of rejection of a situation or a law which one finds unjust or immoral. Conscientious objection to and refusal to do military service is, for instance, civil disobedience. An objector refuses because he does not wish to kill a brother man, he does not obey, because the commands of the conscience are more binding upon him then the commands of men.

The concept of civil disobedience should be seen in the context of obedience to law and its pros and cons. It is expected that laws are made to see that the affairs

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\* Victory referred here is the Allies victory over Hilter in the Second World War

of the society are managed smoothly, and in general it happens to be true. Therefore, it is a moral duty of every citizen to obey, voluntarily, the laws of the land. When one so consciously accepts this duty - of being a law abiding citizen, he or she by accepting that position may, however, sometimes feel obliged to disobey some of these laws. Actually, at times it will become his or her duty to disobey such laws that are immoral, unjust and which foster untruth. Such a dis-obedience can be expressed either violently rejecting the particular law or laws, thus making it "criminal" disobedience or by suffering the legal consequences of disobeying the laws. Gandhi called it "civil" because under the discipline of nonviolence disobedience to a law can only be done in a civil way.

There is no suggestion of weakness or cowardice in Gandhi's insistence on the "civil" aspects of disobedience, for he does not give in to the tyrant. "There is no bravery greater than a resolute refusal to bend the knee to an earthly power, no matter how great, and that without bitterness of spirit and in the fulness of faith that the spirit alone lives, nothing else does" (14) He wrote this while travelling among the Pathans in the then North West Frontier Province of India in 1938. The Pathans who are generally accepted as some of the bravest warring people in the world and whose children also learn to use guns, were pledging in large numbers to continue the freedom struggle without the use of weapons. Their leader, Badshah Khan, was with Gandhi when he wrote the above note entitled "If I were a Czech".

The phrase law abiding citizen, may sound timid or cravenly. Far from it. Practitioners of civil-disobedience obey laws intelligently and of their own free will, and out of responsibility for contributing their mite towards a smooth running of the society, and for the safety and welfare of its members. Thus, they take it to be their sacred duty. It is only when a person has thus obeyed the laws of society scrupulously that he is in a position to judge as to which particular laws are good and just, and which unjust and iniquitous. Only then does the right accrue to him or her of civil disobedience of certain laws in well defined circumstances.

As already mentioned, civil disobedience comes very close to Satyagraha, but as such it is not Satyagraha. Satyagraha is much more than even civil disobedience, a phrase, Gandhi used time and again as a synonym of Satyagraha, but said that he to whom Satyagraha means nothing more than civil disobedience has never understood Satyagraha.

### Satyagraha

But then what is Satyagraha? As far as the terms and concepts defined above, in Gandhi's own words, "Satyagraha is like a banyan tree with innumerable branches. Civil Disobedience is one such branch. Satya (Truth) and Ahimsa (Nonviolence) together make the parent trunk from which all innumerable branches shoot out" (5) This actually is not quite correct, for, most of these concepts had existed and were being practiced before the term Satyagraha came into being. The trade union movement used non-cooperation extensively, and so was direct action by numerous activists, religious and political. However, as defined and practiced by Gandhi and his followers, they were brought under a large umbrella - Satyagraha. Over a period, integrated with the nonviolent approach to conflict resolution, they acquired new connotations, which, as Gandhi said made them look like the "innumerable branches" of the banyan tree.

Satyagraha is war against everything and every force created by human beings, either deliberately or unknowingly, which cause divisions within the human family and by which individuals or groups harass, injure, exploit, or oppress other individuals or groups; at the same time it is a process of transformation of society - in other words of reconstructing human relationships, to bring about an independent society made up of independent individuals living in cooperation among themselves as well as with their environment. Satyagraha by definition, does not imply that the human community will, or even should be free from conflict. In fact it is also a method of conflict resolution. Before going further on the question: What is Satyagraha? let us see how Gandhi conceived the idea and developed it.

Gandhi's upbringing had very much to do with the development of his latter thinking and behaviour. More than that it must have been the way he remembered his childhood and his parents' impact on him which gave him the character of goodness

and fearlessness - two of the key elements of Satyagraha. The outstanding impression his mother had left on him was of being a saintly and deeply religious person, who would take hard vows and would not allow illness or for that matter other things to interrupt their observances. She had strong common sense, and was well informed about all matters of State. His father was truthful, brave, generous, impartial and incorruptible, and had no ambition to accumulate riches. (16) Born to such parents, Gandhi, the youngest of the family must have received all the love and care. Writing about his school days he says, "I do not remember having ever told a lie, ... either to my teachers or to my school mates ..." "There is an incident ... during my first year at the high school ... the Education Inspector, had come on a visit of inspection. He had set us five words to write as a spelling exercise. One of the words was 'kettle'. I had misspelt it. The teacher tried to prompt me with the point of his boot, but I would not be prompted. It was beyond me to see that he wanted me to copy the spellings from my neighbour's slate, for I had thought that the teacher was there to supervise us against copying. The result was that all the boys, except myself, were found to have spelt every word correctly. Only I had been stupid. The teacher tried later to bring this stupidity home to me, but without effect. I never could learn the art of 'copying'." (17) Another significant thing about this incident was that it did not in the least diminish his respect for the teacher.

He has described another episode from his younger days. He had secured his father's permission to see a play performed by a dramatic group. "This play - Harishchandra - captured my heart. I could never be tired of seeing it, but how often should I be permitted to go? It haunted me and I must have acted Harishchandra to myself times without number. 'Why should not all be truthful like Harishchandra' was the question I asked myself day and night. To follow truth and to go through all the ordeals Harishchandra went through was the one ideal it inspired in me". (18) Gandhi called his autobiography "My experiments with Truth", and that indeed was the essence of his life from childhood onwards, and eventually the source of the philosophy of Satyagraha.

In a speech in South Africa, infact his first public speech, he addressed the Indian merchants on the desirability of observing truthfulness in business. He wrote "I had always heard the merchants say that truth was not possible in business ... I strongly contested the position in my speech and awakened the

merchants to the sense of their duty".(19) Again, as a young lawyer, inspite of the fact that in the legal profession truth is often shelved aside, his insistence used to be on the truth of the case. He had gone to South Africa to conduct a court case on behalf of an Indian merchant living in Pretoria. He wrote about the case: "I saw that the facts of Dada Abdulla's case made it very strong indeed, and that the law was bound to be on his side. But I also saw that the litigation, if it were persisted in, would ruin the plaintiff and the defendant, who were relatives and both belonged to the same city. No one knew how long the case might go on. Should it be allowed to continue to be fought out in court, it might go on indefinitely and to no advantage to either party..."

"The lawyer's fees were so rapidly mounting up that they were enough to devour all the resources of the clients, big merchants as they were ... In the meantime mutual ill-will was steadily increasing. I became disgusted with the profession. As lawyers the counsel on both sides were bound to rake up points of law in support of their own clients. I also saw for the first time that the winning party never recovers all the costs incurred. Under the Court Fees Regulation there was a fixed scale of costs to be allowed as between party and party, the actual costs as between attorney and client being very much higher. This was more than I could bear. I felt that my duty was to befriend both parties and bring them together. I strained every nerve to bring about a compromise. At last Tyeb Sheth agreed. An arbitrator was appointed, the case was argued before him, and Dada Abdulla won".(20)

Moreover the young barrister also managed to get Dada Abdulla allow Tyeb Sheth, the defeated party, pay his court costs by long term instalments. [redacted] "It was more difficult for me to secure this concession of payment by instalments than to get the parties to agree to arbitration, but both were happy over the result, and both rose in the public estimation, my joy was boundless. I had learnt to find out the better side of human nature and to enter men's hearts. I realised that the true function of a lawyer was to unite parties riven asunder [redacted] The lesson was so indelibly burnt into me that a large part of my time during the twenty years of my practice as a lawyer was occupied in bringing about private compromises of hundreds of cases. I lost nothing thereby - not even money, certainly not my soul (21)

without fulfilling my obligations. The hardship to which I was subjected was superficial - only a symptom of the deep disease of colour prejudice. I should try, if possible to root out the disease and suffer hardship in the process. Redress for wrongs I should seek only to the extent that would be necessary for the removal of the colour prejudice" (23) He stayed on in South Africa, organised the Indian community to fight for their rights, in the process of which Satyagraha was born. Eventually, the government of General Smutts yielded to most of the demands of the Indians.

Satyagraha means defying oppression and refusing to impose it on others

As I have said at the beginning of the paper satyagraha is often described and defined too loosely. Moreover, for most people it is a method of confrontation or defiance. It is often conceived to be a weapon to fight against the opponent and gain victory. Furthermore, it is considered hardly necessary for those who use the "weapon" to honestly aim at developing the kind of personal character which gives the necessary strength to endure suffering without becoming bitter or disillusioned. This is due to reducing Satyagraha to a mere tool or weapon, which, it is supposed, any disgruntled person can use against the "enemy". Politicians and political activists use this weapon, only if they find it expedient in a given situation, not because they aim at resolving the conflict permanently and create understanding in human relationships. For many it is thought to be something that can be effective in grabbing power.

In other words, what goes in the name of Satyagraha is far from the Satyagraha which Gandhi practiced and tried to teach to his followers. His Satyagraha is what the word literally means - adhering to truth firmly. A satyagrahi is one who lives his or her life in truth, with truth and with firmness on truth. Truth, according to Gandhi implies love and firmness engenders force. Thus satyagraha is the foundation of the life. A satyagrahi is not a member of an army of "fighters". Any person living a life which is guided by this truth-force, love-force is a satyagrahi, who never seeks confrontation and all the time aims at fostering cooperation, but will not fight shy of confronting a situation with all the power of truth behind him. He will never cooperate with evil fraud or falsehood, or any

kind of untruth. Gandhi says that fraud and untruth today are stalking the world; he cannot sit as a helpless witness to such a situation. "If today I sit quiet and inactive, God will take me to task for not using up the treasure He had given me, in the midst of the conflagration that is enveloping the whole world" (24)

I would like to discuss the Champaran Satyagraha to illustrate the point that Satyagraha is a way of life, a philosophy on the basis of which the life of the individual and the community is built. It is a process of conducting oneself, and if in this process a situation of conflict arises the individual and/or the community does not "sit quiet or inactive", but responds to the situation with courage, calm and determination, and with humility.

Champaran is a district in the State of Bihar. The region cultivated vast quantity of indigo. The planters, i.e. landlords were Britishers, who were exploiting the tenants, which was a great concern of the Congress organisation of Bihar. In 1916, the thirty-first session of the All India National Congress took place in Lucknow, the capital of the adjacent State, U.P. Gandhi had returned from South Africa in 1914 and had already travelled throughout the length and breadth of India to learn about the situation in the country. He was also at the Lucknow Congress session, at which, among many other resolutions, there was one about the relations between the planters and their tenants of Champaran. The delegates from Bihar wanted Gandhi to speak on the resolution, but he declined saying that he knew nothing about the matter, and unless he has made himself acquainted with the situation, he would say or do nothing. After the resolution was passed, urging the government to set up a mixed committee of officials and nonofficials to inquire into the causes of agrarian trouble some delegates, particularly those from Champaran urged Gandhi to visit the area to study the pitiable condition of its people and suggest means for improving it. He accepted the request and went to Champaran in April 1917 on a fact finding mission. He had not the faintest idea that this enquiry would take a turn in the direction of a campaign of civil disobedience. Naturally, he began his work by writing a letter to the Commissioner of the Tirhut Division, seeking from him the co-operation of the local administration. He also sought an interview with him so that he could place before him the object of the inquiry. He met the Commissioner the next morning.

He again wrote a letter to the Commissioner, as promised, enclosing a note from Braj Kishore Prasad and some other prominent people of Muzaffarpur. I fear that I might have failed to convey to you the exact scope of my mission. I therefore re-state it here. I am anxious to test the accuracy of the statements made to me by various friends regarding Indigo matters and to find out for myself whether I can render useful assistance. My mission is that of making peace with honour" (25)

He did not leave a single stone unturned to bring home to the administration that his work involved only making a public inquiry and had no element of confrontation. Despite this explanation, at the request of the Commissioner, the District Magistrate served him an Order under Sec 144 Cr.P.C. to leave the District "by the next available train". Gandhi sent a reply via the Police Inspector who had brought him the Order. "... I am sorry ... that the Commissioner of the Division has totally misinterpreted my position. Out of a sense of public responsibility, I feel it to be my duty to say that I am unable to leave the District but if it so pleases the authorities, I shall submit to the order by suffering the penalty of disobedience". He emphatically repudiated the Commissioner's suggestion that his object was likely to be agitation. "My desire is purely and simply for a genuine search for knowledge. And this I shall continue to satisfy so long as I am left free". (26)

The important point here is that even after receiving such a hostile and provocative response from the Commissioner he continued striving to contain the situation within the boundaries of a fact finding mission and not letting it be driven into a tussle. The same day he wrote a letter to the Private Secretary of the Viceroy, who, he asked, should place it before the Viceroy. He challenged the British Government to disprove his motivation and the peaceful character of his method of resolving the conflict. "My motivation is national service and that too, so long as it is consistent with humanitarian dictates. I understand, because my South African work was considered to be humanitarian that I was awarded the Kaiser-i-Hind Gold Medal. So long as my humanitarian motive is questioned, so long must I remain undeserving of holding the medal. I am therefore asking my people to return the medal to you, and I shall feel honoured to receive it back if it is returned to me when my motive is no longer questioned".

"As to the question itself, so far as I have been able to examine the evidence, given to me, it shows that the planters have successfully used the civil and criminal courts and illegal force to enrich themselves at the expense of ryots and that the ryots\* are living under a reign of terror and that their property, their persons, and their minds are all under the planters' heels. . . . The local administration admits that they are sitting upon a mine so dangerous that they cannot tolerate my presence. And yet they manage to be satisfied with the slow inquiry of a settlement officer. . ." (27) Gandhi also wrote to Maganlal to send the gold medal to the Private Secretary of the Viceroy, by registered parcel.

He had planned to leave for Shampur the next morning at 3 A.M. It is remarkable how integrated his approach to life was, both morally as well as politically. He wrote to the District Magistrate; "As I have no desire to do anything without the knowledge of the authorities, I beg to inform you that (assuming there is no service of summons for appearance before the court tomorrow) I am going to Shampur. . ." (28) He felt it morally obligatory to let the authorities know about his movements. Moreover, it was an act of masterly craftsmanship on his part as a Satyagrahi, as otherwise he would have been accused of evasion of arrest etc. I find his returning the gold medal back to the British government an act which was morally and tactically brilliant. By taking such actions a satyagrahi keeps himself or herself above suspicion or secrecy.

The Magistrate wrote back asking Gandhi if he could remain in Motihari, to which he replied, ". . . I beg to state that I shall gladly remain in Motihari tomorrow and await summons." Note the word "gladly". I do not think that he used this word as a matter of habit or formality. I am convinced that his self-confidence, fearlessness prompted him to use such a word, which, as tactics also can be effective in disarming the other side. He was charged and summoned to appear in the court. All this happened within six days. Some of the most devoted and capable men from Bihar were already with him conducting the inquiry; and in case of Gandhi's arrest, to carry on the work according to the norms which had been decided upon with every necessary detail during this period. Comprehensive instructions had also been worked out for workers at different levels. The inquiry, a truth seeking process had now taken the form of a struggle.

News of the trial spread like wild fire among the people of the region, who flocked into the court compound on the day of the trial, 18th April. The Press was well altered too. Gandhi had prepared a statement to be read to the court as his reply to the charges against him.

The government lawyers had come prepared with every possible argument that could be found in their law books. Rajendra Prasad, describing the scene in the court room wrote "... There the government pleader was ready with his books of law and precedent. He had perhaps thought that he was going to prosecute a great man like Mahatma Gandhi who had himself been a famous lawyer and he expected that there would be a very long and learned argument. He had possibly not slept the previous night, looking up precedents and law reports." (29) When the Magistrate asked him, if he had any lawyer Gandhi said, "No, none". I quote the full statement, which I see as a treatise on Satyagraha and a "handbook" for satyagrahis.

"With the permission of the Court, I would like to make a brief statement showing why I have taken the very serious step of seemingly disobeying the order made under Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code. In my humble opinion, it is a question of difference of opinion between the local administration and myself. I have entered the country with motives of rendering humanitarian and national service. I have done so in response to a pressing invitation to come and help the ryots, who urge they are not being fairly treated by the indigo planters. I could not render any help without studying the problem. I have, therefore, come to study it with the assistance, if possible, of the administration and the planters. I have no other motive and I cannot believe that my coming here can in any way disturb the public peace or cause loss of life. I claim to have considerable experience in such matters. The administration, however, have thought differently. I fully appreciate their difficulty, and I admit too, that they can only proceed upon information they receive. As a law-abiding citizen, my first instinct would be, as it was, to obey the order served upon me. I could not do so without doing violence to my sense of duty to those for whom I have come. I feel that I could just now serve them only by remaining in their midst. I could not, therefore, voluntarily retire. Amid this conflict of duty, I could only throw the responsibility of removing me from them on the administration.

"I am fully conscious of the fact that a person, holding in the public life of India a position such as I do, has to be most careful in setting examples. It is my firm belief that in the complex constitution under which we are living, the only safe and honourable course for a self-respecting man is, in the circumstances such as face me, to do what I have decided to do, that is, to submit without protest to the penalty of disobedience. I have ventured to make this statement not in any way in extenuation of the penalty to be awarded against me, but to show that I have disregarded the order served upon me, not for want of respect for lawful authority, but in obedience of the higher law of our being the voice of conscience." (30)

Gandhi knew that under the section 144 of Criminal Penal Code the order was wholly illegal, and even if the magistrate had convicted him, he would have surely been acquitted by the high court. The government pleader <sup>was</sup> nervously expecting that he would offer defence. He on the other hand was not interested in "resisting evil" by using legalistic methods. It was not a case of legal battles, but a political and moral struggle to eliminate exploitation and to train the exploited masses to face the situation nonviolently, and courageously. Gandhi did not offer any defence.

The magistrate could not make up his mind as to what to do next. He repeatedly asked Gandhi, if he pleaded guilty. Gandhi's reply was that he had said whatever he had to say in his statement. The magistrate said that the statement did not contain a clear plea of guilt. Thereupon Gandhi said that he did not wish to waste the time of the court and he pleaded guilty. This put out the magistrate still further. He told Gandhi that if he would leave the District immediately and promised not to return, the case against him would be withdrawn. Gandhi's reply to this was that that cannot be, not to speak of this time alone, he shall make Champaran his home even after his return from jail.

The magistrate was dumb founded. He could not take a decision, and postponed the trial until later in the day. Soon after the morning sitting of the court, an official came and said to Gandhi that the magistrate wanted to see him. The magistrate requested Gandhi to postpone his visits to villages for three days to which he agreed. At the trial in the afternoon the magistrate offered to release Gandhi on a bail of one hundred rupees, which Gandhi refused. The magistrate

was again in a dilemma, but he found a way out. He released Gandhi on his personal recognisance. The work of the enquiry continued with added vigour. There was no end to tenants coming in large numbers to give statements. At the end the government found itself helpless as they well knew that truth was on the side of the tenants and not the planters. The case was not only withdrawn, the authorities promised cooperation with the enquiries. Within a few months a new law came into being, according to which most of the grievances of the tenants were removed.

Rajendra Prasad wrote, "A real and genuine desire to secure relief for the tenants and an equally genuine anxiety to avoid any thought of doing any injury to the planters, a readiness to suffer for his principles and what he considered to be his duty, an unalterable faith in the power of truth and a complete absence of fear from worldly powers - these made such a tremendous change possible. To hold to these firmly is called Satyagraha." (31)

A notable feature of the Champaran Satyagraha was that did not relate itself to the larger cause, namely the freedom of India. The reason probably lies in the fact that Satyagraha, in its confrontation form comes to the satyagrahi by itself. One has not to go in search of it, as this character or if you like virtue, is inherent in the principle. Although it was unlikely at that stage of the freedom struggle, the probability of the Champaran Satyagraha developing into a wider campaign cannot be totally ruled out.

I am aware of the fact that I have dwelled too long upon one single event, so very well known to all. But I felt that instead of going into the exercise theoretically, I should take just one example as a model to elaborate and concretize the theme i.e that Satyagraha is an integrated moral and political philosophy which neither accepts oppression by others nor allows to oppress others. Socialist revolution and oppression

The socialist revolution, no doubt, has brought about a remarkable awareness about the forces behind imperialist and capitalist exploitation, problems of socio-political relations. The changes that have taken place in terms of distribution of wealth and social services have given enormous relief to the poor and the working class in many countries. The growth of trade-unionism has been a mighty outcome of the socialist philosophy. However, in societies where socialist revolution has been successful in making such changes, people at large find their governments oppressive.

The most notable thing in this connection about socialist revolution is the contrast between the pre-revolution and post-revolution attitudes, behaviours and profiles of their leaders. During revolution they are hailed as liberators, especially immediately after the successful ending of the struggle in over-throwing of the earlier regime. When the 'revolution' is over, i.e taking over the command of the administration by the new leadership, one of the first acts of the new regime is to ask the people to surrender all the arms they had used for liberating themselves. In reality, one finds the situation in those countries very different - far from that of a liberated society. For instance dissent is not liked; those who like things to be done differently and dare to give expression to their feelings are looked down upon; sometimes they are sent to reeducation camps and sometimes even behind bars. The truth is that it is easier to fight oppression than not to turn into oppressors ourselves.

One can sympathise with these new rulers, as it is not hard to comprehend their problems. They face a situation like of which they have never experienced before. They had not given any thought to human reconstruction during the revolution. Under such conditions the situation can and often goes out of control. After all, not many people know what real freedom is and if some know it, they may not know how to use it for the good of all. Moreover, under the new condition almost invariably, reactionary forces and agents of the previous systems within and without the country become active. As far as state power goes every kind of regime is like the others. There is no difference in a socialist or a Capitalist regime when it comes to repressing the opposition. Every government uses its police and military to maintain power. They know only physical force of which they have ample expertise and tools. The vicious circle starts, resulting in the new rulers - yesterday's liberators, turn into today's oppressors.

There is no escape from this vicious circle unless some fundamental changes take place in the outlook and attitudes of the revolutionaries. The perspective to look at revolution needs some revolutionary changes. As a beginning of the process of such a change I want to make the following proposal to the revolutionaries.

It should be realized that in the pursuit of power they adopt the same means as were used by the oppressors against who they were fighting. In other words they become part and parcel of the vicious circle, thus ending up by reversing roles.

It should be understood once for all that the use of such means inevitably lead to oppressive societies. It is essential to grasp the idea that if a society wants to give up violent means in its administration, security and foreign relation matters it will need total revision of its socio-economic basis. Lastly, if a society is built in such a way that it is always kept fully prepared to face and defy oppression from within or without, the weapons necessary to do so must always be available to each of its members, and should be such that can never be taken away from them.

In a nut-shell: Gandhi's Satyagraha, of which constructive programme was an *integral part, indicate a way to an oppression-free world. It would be a world in which each and every person should be able to say: I shall not be affraid of anyone, nor shall I do anything to make anyone else affraid of me.*