

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Philosophy of Non-violence Lessons of Gandhism*

MARIETTA STEPANYANTS

His voice may not be heard by many in the tumult and shouting of today, but it will have to be heard and understood some time or other if this world is to survive in any civilised form. — *Jawaharlal Nehru*

EVERY culture has its own scale to measure moral values. This, however, does not exclude its essential oneness with the value systems of other cultures. Proof of this is provided in particular by the eternal search for a higher ideal, the way to which is endless, like the ever-receding horizon. The summit of perfection, of moral height, towards which people aspire, is called by different names by different people. In India, one who “possesses a divine nature, has attained the highest perfection” and is no more subjected to rebirth is called a Mahatma — a great soul.¹

How did it come about that this name was given in the twentieth century to a small-statured, frail-looking man with a long nose and thick lips — an ordinary-looking man, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, born in the state of Gujarat? Why was it that this man — condemned by his enemies and ill-wishers variously as “an agent of British imperialism”, “a servitor of the Indian bourgeoisie” and “a naked fakir” — found a place in history as a Mahatma? What is the explanation of the fact that of all the leaders of the

Indian freedom movement it was to Gandhi alone that the people gave the name of a Great Soul?

Gandhi himself seems to have provided an answer to this question in a statement he made in 1929, in which he said that man's achievement consists in harmonising "*dharma* and the ultimate aim of life, truth and *swarāj*."² Gandhi's greatness lies in the fact that he was more sensitive than all other leaders to the thoughts and feelings of his countrymen. By providing the national freedom movement a religious and ethical motivation, he was able to inspire millions of people to be ready for great heroic deeds and sacrifices for the sake of a sacred cause. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was of the view that popular awakening could be brought about only through political activity and if such activity was spiritualised, it could show the path to *mokṣa*, that is, salvation.³ Gandhi became a Mahatma precisely because he directed his religious reformation, his thoughts and deeds towards national regeneration and building up an ideal society based on universal prosperity.

After a short period of practice as a lawyer in India, Gandhi set sail for South Africa. In Pretoria, he and his compatriots came face to face with the crudest manifestations of racism. In his first letter to Leo Tolstoy (whom Gandhi considered "the highest moral authority") written on 1 October 1909, Gandhi described the situation in Pretoria in these words:

There is in that colony a British Indian population of nearly 13,000. These Indians have for several years laboured under various legal disabilities. The prejudice against colour and in some respects against Asiatics is intense in that colony. . . . The climax was reached three years ago, with a law which I and many others considered to be degrading and calculated to unman those to whom it was applicable.⁴ I felt that submission to a law of this

nature was inconsistent with the spirit of true religion. I and some of my friends were and still are firm believers in the doctrine of non-resistance to evil. I had the privilege of studying your writings also which made a deep impression on my mind. British Indians, before whom the position was fully explained, accepted the advice that we should not submit to the legislation, but that we should suffer imprisonment or whatever other penalties the law may impose for its breach.⁵

Gandhi's proposed campaign of civil disobedience came to be known as *satyāgraha* which, translated from his native Gujarati, means literally "insistence on truth." What made Gandhi select such a method of struggle?

There is a widely held view that in his student years, Gandhi was subjected to such a strong Anglo-Saxon influence that he always remained British to the core, that the idea of *satyāgraha* was basically Christian and was borrowed by Gandhi from the Bible, from the Sermon on the Mount. This made one of the researchers into Gandhi's life state: "*Satyāgraha* is a new Indian word for some old ways of Western thinking."⁶

There is also the opposite viewpoint, namely that Gandhism is an exclusively Indian phenomenon, which has grown from the cult of non-violence which is characteristic of Indian religions and of the Indian philosophical spirit.⁷ Gandhi himself repeatedly acknowledged the influence of three Western writers on himself — Henry David Thoreau, Leo Tolstoy and John Ruskin. But he also constantly spoke about the Indian sources that formed his views. His acquaintance with the spiritual wealth of his ancestors began with the reading and learning by heart of the *Rāmāyana*, while he was still in his pre-school years, and later the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. Later in life, he called this book "Mother Gītā" and sought guidance from it every time he was in need of help or advice. For Gandhi, the war between

the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas was not of historical but of a symbolic significance. The call "Stand up and fight" he understood as a call to defeat evil in oneself.

The fact that Gandhi was brought up in an atmosphere where Hindus, Jainas, Muslims and Parsis lived peacefully side by side and where *ahimsā* was acknowledged as a principle of life, also played no mean role. It is therefore not fortuitous that the following line from a didactic poem in his native Gujarati, which he once came across, forever won his heart and his mind: "But the truly noble know all men as one. And return with gladness good for evil done."

Persistence in Truth

Why did Gandhi call his method "insistence on Truth"? What did Truth mean to him? Researchers have spared no effort to unravel the meaning hidden in the basic Gandhian axiom "Truth is God." A key to this riddle may be found in a letter that Gandhi wrote on 9 July 1932. In this letter, he spoke of the formula "God is Truth," which Gandhi later referred to as "Truth is God." In this letter, he says:

In "God is Truth," "is" certainly does not mean "equal to" nor does it merely mean "is truthful". Truth is not a mere attribute of God, but He is That. He is nothing if He is not That. Truth in Sanskrit means *Sat*. *Sat* means "is." Therefore Truth is implied in Is. God is, Nothing else is.⁹

Gandhi's idea of Truth cannot be explained by a metaphysical description. It is not realisable by the mind, it is existential. "God is Truth and Love; God is ethics and morality; God is fearlessness. God is the source of Light and Life and yet He is above and beyond all these."¹⁰

In the statements quoted above, there clearly exists a pantheistically tinted vision. God-realisation is understood as realisation of Truth. That is precisely why Gandhi revised

his previous formula. He attached tremendous importance to this and considered it the most significant of his theoretical discoveries. Thus Truth appears before us as a basically ethical category.

Gandhi considers absolute Truth (that is, God) unrealisable. At the same time he holds that the meaning of human existence lies in the effort to realise it. He further observes:

But as long as I have not realised this absolute Truth, so long must I hold by the relative Truth as I have conceived it. That relative Truth must meanwhile be my beacon, my shield and buckler.¹¹

It is prompted by the "inner voice," in other words, conscience. One must live according to one's conscience, constantly striving towards perfection, towards the realisation of Truth in oneself and in society.

Such statements are possible only for one who takes a non-orthodox view of traditional religious precepts. In fact, Gandhi was convinced that man's ideas about religion are imperfect, and therefore they must constantly be the object of the process of evolution and reinterpretation. He considered a critical reading of the religious texts not only permissible but also necessary:

Error no matter, however immemorial it may be, cannot derive sanctity, and even a Vedic text, if it is inconsistent with morality, with justice, will have to go by the board.¹²

Gandhi's own life was an example of an untiring, bold and decisive experiment with Truth. It is not fortuitous that his autobiography is called *Autobiography or the Story of My Experiments with Truth*.

Gandhi's experiments were basically different from those which are known in Hindu, Buddhist or Jaina traditions. They are not limited only to the internal world of man. They are conducted in the broad social context and

involve not only individual but, of necessity, joint, collective efforts. We shall quote just one example. The main theme of Indian religious-philosophical thinking is the problem of suffering (*duḥkha*). Almost all Indian philosophical systems are concerned with finding ways and means of ridding oneself of suffering. The causes of suffering are supposed to be bad behaviour in one's "former birth," that is to say, the blame for suffering falls on man himself because in his former life he was guilty of unworthy actions, was not pious, and so on. The solution suggested is either meek acceptance of the sufferings one is made to undergo and exemplary behaviour in the hope of a happier life in one's next birth, or snapping of the chain of *samsāra* through the achievement of *nirvāṇa*. Both these ways are meant for the individual and are marked by a certain egoistic and asocial character.

Gandhi also considers suffering to be "the law of human beings." He assumes that the guilt for this lies not only on the individual, but on society as a whole. And therefore freedom from suffering can be achieved only through efforts aimed at improving both the individual and the society. Gandhi's arguments often appear paradoxical. Thus, he avers that suffering can be overcome by suffering, which "is more than a tool of conflict resolution, it is a way of changing reality."¹³

In Gandhi's view the main source of suffering lies in violence which manifests itself in various forms. Therefore, one can get rid of suffering by responding to violence by non-violent suffering.

Violence is seen by Gandhi as the presence of the animal spirit in man whereas non-violence, in his opinion, is a sign of man's divine essence. This is why he asserts that non-violence is a synonym for Truth-God, its "soul" and means of realisation. Hence, "*ahimsā* is one's highest religious duty." Gandhi admits that by itself the ideal of non-violence is not

original. It is an "eternal truth." He sees his own contribution in that he tries to use eternal truths in everyday life.

The experiments conducted by Gandhi are virtually experiments with different forms of non-violence, which he carried out both on the individual and the social levels. Gandhi consistently followed the principle of *ahimsā* in his personal life. In 1906, at the age of 36, he took the vow to observe *brahmacarya*. However, renunciation of all forms of violence was nothing new. (It is well known that Jains, for instance, observe strict *ahimsā*.) What was new was Gandhi's experiment in using *ahimsā* in the social sphere.

Satyāgraha in Action

The non-violent civil disobedience movement that Gandhi conducted in South Africa from 1908 to 1914 was very successful. The authorities had to make a series of concessions, which made life somewhat easier for the Indians. The *satyāgraha* attracted the attention of the international community. Among those who extended their support to Gandhi were Bernard Shaw, Albert Einstein, Bertrand Russell, Romain Rolland and Leo Tolstoy.

Gandhi returned to India in 1915. In May of the same year, he founded his *Satyāgraha āśrama* near Ahmedabad. His *āśrama* turned into a kind of laboratory for his social experiment of realising in practice the principle of non-violence in a collective manner. During this period, Gandhi's *satyāgraha* campaigns in India were conducted for protecting the rights of the peasants in Gujarat from being expropriated by planters and the British colonial exchequer.

The first all-India *satyāgraha* took place in April 1919. Gandhi later called it "a Himalayan miscalculation."¹⁴ This was because it was not found possible to avoid violent actions. Gandhi saw his "grave error" in what had happened

in that he had called upon the people to launch civil disobedience prematurely.¹⁵

Gandhi looked upon *satyāgraha* as a method of meeting the just demands of the people. He considered it a *satyāgrahī's* duty to act openly, refusing to be part of any kind of a conspiracy, plot, etc. A *satyāgrahī* must think not in terms of one or two, but in terms of 400 million people. No secret or underground movement could ever become a mass movement or awaken millions to mass action.¹⁶

A *satyāgrahī* is called upon to achieve his/her aims without causing physical or material harm to an "opponent." In case of punishment, he/she must accept it without a murmur, with utmost humility. Obviously, it is extremely difficult to conduct oneself in this manner. That is why it is necessary to prepare very seriously for participation in *satyāgrahas*. Constructive work is what drill is for an army, which is meant to conduct a bloody war,¹⁷ wrote Gandhi. He believed that this type of work ought to inculcate in a *satyāgrahī* consciousness of strength, calmness and firm resolution.

Thanks to the efforts of Gandhi and his associates, *satyāgraha* got acceptance and support from the Indian National Congress. An extraordinary session of the Indian National Congress held in September 1920 adopted a special resolution, drafted by Gandhi, adopting "progressive non-violent non-co-operation." This resolution acknowledged *satyāgraha* as a national method of struggle against colonialism. The resolution noted, in particular, that the people of India had only one way open to them — to accept and adopt the policy of progressive non-violent non-co-operation. A call was issued by this session appealing to the people not to buy foreign goods, not to participate in elections to legislative bodies, not to join the army, to boycott British courts, schools and colleges, to turn down titles of

honour and to resign from posts in the local administrative organs.

The most striking example of *satyāgraha* was the world famous "Salt March" which Gandhi organised with the aim of demonstrating open and all-round violation of the law which gave a monopoly for the manufacture of salt to the British authorities.

Pragmatic Idealism

Referring to the method of *satyāgraha*, Jawaharlal Nehru wrote that it was a striking, though non-violent, form of resistance. In fact, it should be regarded as a peaceful uprising, a highly civilised way of conducting a war. It became an effective method for rousing the broad masses of the people to action, a method which suited the psychological make-up of the Indian people. This was precisely what many of Gandhi's opponents and critics failed to comprehend. They saw in this position Gandhi's weakness, a tendency to subject the interests of the people to those of the colonisers. This was the opinion even of some of those who claimed to have made a careful study of Gandhism. Here is a typical statement:

Gandhi's non-violence turned into a historical phenomenon only because it suited the interests of the Indian bourgeoisie. . . . Non-violence is the product of a metaphysical, idealistic contra posing of the spirit to matter, an artificial separation of man from his environment.¹⁸

In fact, however, Gandhi's choice of this tactic of political struggle was notable for its realistic nature, for its perceptive understanding of historical possibilities as well as of the national psychology of the Indian people. Gandhi's choice was dictated not only by high moral ideals, but also by objective realities.

The man who was accused of "idealism" was in reality a pragmatist (in the good sense of the word), who realised

that calling upon an unarmed people to revolt against the colonial authorities who relied on a well-organised machinery of state force (police, army, and so on) was tantamount to sanctioning a massacre, condemning tens, perhaps hundreds, of thousands of people to death. Gandhi's realistic pragmatism was also derived from the fact that he acknowledged the need for an ethical motivation of action on the part of his countrymen, who were known for their deep religiosity — for them killing a person in a certain sense meant killing their own selves. This kind of “moral suicide” could weaken the “fighting spirit” of those who participated in the movement for national liberation, and deprive the movement of its moral and religious basis. Gandhi's adherence to non-violence was not a sign of weakness. On the contrary, it expressed an optimistic faith in man, in the strength of his spirit, his ability to actively influence the surrounding world. Gandhi did not consider that ideology, moral level and ethical values are entirely a product of material surroundings. On the contrary, surroundings become what we are. We alone are the cause and the creators of our surroundings, and no one else.

Salvation is Freedom

What kind of “surroundings” did the Mahatma want to create? In the first place, he wanted a free, independent environment. Gandhi dreamed of establishing Rām Rājya, a kingdom of God on earth, based on the principles of *swarāj* — non-violent democracy. As always, Gandhi formulated his ideas in simple language, adding the context of traditional culture, to make them comprehensible to the average Indian so that he could attract the masses to the realisation of his ideas. For him *swarāj* was *mokṣa* — the ultimate goal of Hinduism, Buddhism or Jainism.

Gandhi interprets *mokṣa* as self-control in the broadest sense of the word. This is, above all, freedom from passions, from sinful attachments, a freedom which is entirely personal to the individual. Not long before his death, Gandhi was asked to explain in more definite terms what he understood by *mokṣa*. He replied,

the desire for *mokṣa* was indeed there, but it was not meant for anyone other than the individual himself. The world was interested in the fruits, not the root. For the tree itself, however, the chief concern should be not fruits, but the root. It was in the depth of one's own being that the individual had. He had to nurse it with the water of his labour and suffering. The root was his chief concern.¹⁹

Man is freed from everything that is false and superficial, at the same time strengthening his own real "I" by means of "patience, perseverance, ceaseless toil, courage and intelligent appreciation of the environment."²⁰ *Mokṣa* or liberation, is therefore the result of self-control, which is the "truest *swarāj*."²¹

From the statements quoted above it becomes evident that Gandhi interprets *mokṣa* as the affirmation of life on healthy foundations. Moreover, he sees *mokṣa* not as an exclusively individual goal, but as a social objective since the freedom of the people as a whole is built from the "liberation" achieved by separate individuals. *Mokṣa* or *swarāj*, on a countrywide scale means, according to Gandhi, self-rule, liberation from the dictates of the government, no matter whether it is native, or foreign, i.e. British.²²

In Gandhi's view, *swarāj* should ensure India a non-violent political structure. For this, it should be a decentralised structure and India ought to be turned into a confederation of free and voluntarily interacting villages, each of them being a State unto itself, having full powers.²³ The village will undertake to provide the inhabitants food, clothing, the organisation of law and justice, education and

culture (a village theatre, school, hall for meetings, and so on), and also protection from possible external foes. The government will be carried out through the *panchayat* — five men and women, elected by the villagers. The only electoral qualification, apart from age, is labour: the right to vote will belong to those who engage in physical labour. The society, which consists of a free confederation of village republics will, in Gandhi's words,

not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom — i.e. not an hierarchical structure based on force — but it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual. The whole becomes one life composed of individuals never aggressive in their arrogance, but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units.²⁴

According to the Gandhian concept of direct democracy the people, through a system of multi-stage elections entrust their power to those whom they choose — members of parliament which by itself does not possess any power and does not exist apart from the people.

State law is not absolute, because natural law stands above it. Natural law is defined simultaneously as religious law dictated by a person's conscience. Gandhi believed in perfect democracy being based on personal freedom: an individual is the creator of his own government; both he and his government are governed by the law of non-violence; he and his villages are capable of challenging the whole world.²⁵

The concept of natural law was not explained in detail by Gandhi. From several statements made by him one may draw the conclusion that he understood "natural" as something given by God to man. Man is obliged to listen to the voice of his conscience, and his conscience, in turn, presumes doing his duty, that which in essence, is termed *karma* in Indian religious tradition. The real source of laws

is duty. This teaching was expressed by Kṛṣṇa as: "Only action belongs to you, its fruits do not depend on you." Action is duty. The result of action is law.²⁶

Gandhi's acknowledgement of *karma* as duty is evidence of his belief in the legitimacy of the caste system. No matter how radical he was as a reformer, he cannot get away from what constitutes the fundamental basis of his religious belief. Otherwise he would cross the limits across which lies a phenomenon principally different from what he wishes to reform.

What in other languages is called religion is given the name of *dharma* in India. Literally (in Sanskrit) it means "that which holds." The semantic meaning of *dharma* is multifarious. It includes cosmic law, which determines the order of the universe and is the basis of morality, ethics, manifestation of reality, the teaching of Buddha, and so on. *Dharma* in Hinduism considers an ideal society to be one in which every individual performs his duty, his obligations conforming to the four stages of life — *āśrama dharma*, and four *varṇas* — *varṇa dharma*.

Gandhi does not question the importance of maintaining stability in society, which is achieved by division of labour, i.e. caste pluralism. But his outlook is vastly different from the traditional attitude to the institution of caste — he is categorically against caste discrimination. The Mahatma does not see man's duty in observing formal, predetermined norms of behaviour. He sees it in following the inner voice of conscience. Everyone must know what is *dharma* and what is its antithesis. For Gandhi, *dharma* means selfless service of others. The root of *dharma*, he affirmed, "is compassion."²⁷ *Ahimsā* and *satya* are two talismans of "the royal road of *dharma* that leads both to earthly and spiritual bliss."²⁸

Gandhi does not look upon caste affinity as a sign of superiority of some over others. He says, for example, that

all should strive to be śūdras. He affirms the unity of people, their interconnection with one another, which is the result of the divine nature equally manifested in every person. It would seem that Gandhi undertook an impossible task. He declared that the outcaste Indians — the untouchables — are “children of God.” And he called them *Harijans*. Gandhi often said that though he belonged to a higher caste, in his next birth he would like to be born an untouchable.

As always, the Mahatma did not limit himself to declaring his beliefs. He tried to realise them. He founded the weekly *Harijan* in order to start a mass movement to remove caste discrimination. Gandhi demanded the necessary changes in law and — even more — a change in the personal attitude of every Indian towards the most deprived among his compatriots. He set an example himself by inviting untouchables into his *āśrama*. He made it obligatory for all those who lived in his *āśrama* to take a vow to fight untouchability. Gandhi undertook fasts many times to protest against caste discrimination against *Harijans*.

Similarly, Gandhi’s adherence to the idea of unity of all people determined his attitude to those belonging to other religions. He was categorically against discrimination based on religion, rightly calling it a manifestation of violence and therefore *harām* — a sin.

Gandhi’s statements on the subject of religion and politics and their relationship may appear contradictory. In point of fact, Gandhi asserted that religion is a personal matter and it should have no place in politics.²⁹ But he himself had said, that those who say that religion has nothing in common with politics don’t know what religion is.³⁰ Thus Gandhi speaks as a partisan of secularism in the first statement, while in the second he speaks as its opponent. To understand and correctly interpret such statements it is necessary to read them in their proper

contexts. The Mahatma spoke from a secular position when it was a question of “exploiting religion” for narrow selfish political ends. For example, he does not accept the theory of “two nations,” according to which religion is the main factor in the formation of a nation. This theory was utilised by the politicians to justify the Partition of India into two states and for whipping up confrontation between the Hindu and Muslim communities. At the same time, Gandhi is an opponent of secularism if by this term one understands the negation of religion in the organisation of social life.

The real significance of Gandhi’s position can be understood if we consider at least three most important points. Firstly, genuine belief in God and service to God in Gandhi’s thinking is service to the people.

I recognise no God except the God that is to be found in the hearts of the dumb millions, they do not recognise His presence; I do and I worship the God that is Truth, or Truth which is God, through the service of these millions.³¹

Secondly, the Mahatma looks upon religion as a basis for bringing together human society. Gandhi held that different religious teachings are beautiful flowers from a single garden or branches of a mighty tree: all of them are true in equal measure. The Allah of Islam, Gandhi said, is the same as God of the Christians and the *Īśvara* of Hindus. Real faith assumes equal respect for all religions. It would be the greatest expression of intolerance — and intolerance is another variety of violence — to think that one’s own religion is more perfect than the religion of the other.³²

And, finally, the third point. As has already been noted above, the Mahatma saw the path to the realisation of Truth-God in non-violence, and only non-violence.

Thus, while affirming the unity of politics and religion, Gandhi, in essence, insists on morality as an obligatory factor in political actions.

Spinning Wheel vs. the Big Machine

For Gandhi liberation of the Indian people from colonial oppression was not the final objective of struggle. In freedom he saw only the first step towards building a non-violent civilisation.

Gandhi explained his views on civilisation in detail in his paper *Indian Opinion* as far back as 1908, while he was in South Africa. This "dialogue" of the editor (Gandhi) with the reader was later published as a separate brochure called *Hind Swarāj* or "Indian Home Rule."

By civilisation (in Gandhi's native Gujarati the word is *sadācāra* which means "good conduct") he understood that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty.³³ Contemporary Western civilisation does not correspond to this understanding and is therefore the incarnation of "evil." "The chief symbol" of Western civilisation is the machine which "represents a great sin."³⁴ Gandhi was opposed to the big machine because in machine-production he saw the destruction of cottage industries and the traditional Indian way of life. "It is machine that has impoverished India. It is due to Manchester that Indian handicraft has all but disappeared."³⁵ Gandhi compared machine production with a snake-hole which may contain from one to a hundred snakes: "cities destroying villages, slavery of the workers, horrible exploitation of female labour, unemployment, sexual laxity, lack of faith in God, and mechanical means of transport which harm the health of the people." Violence permeates Western civilisation in all its spheres — in economics, in politics, in mutual relations between people, in international relations. "The greatest sin" of the civilisation was imperialism.³⁶

Gandhi was repulsed by the machine-dominated West because of the destruction of man's links with nature.

Gandhi's world outlook fully reflected the attitudes of European opponents of machine-civilisation, so well expressed by Nikolai Berdyaev:

Technology radically changes man's relationship to space and time. It is inimical to all organic bodies. In the technological period of civilisation man stops living among animals and plants. He plunges into a new cold-metallic atmosphere, in which there is no more animal warmth, no blood. The rule of technology leads to the weakening of emotionality in human life. . . . Technology kills all that is organic in life. . . .³⁷

True civilisation, in Gandhi's view, must be based on the principles of conscious and voluntary self-restraint. In the economic field, this means relying on the villages and cottage industries. It was no accident that Gandhi chose the spinning wheel as the symbol of the national freedom movement. He looked upon the spinning wheel as an instrument of national regeneration. The spinning wheel could revive handicrafts and free the Indian people from dependence on colonial imports of cloth, ensure mass employment, and in this way remove unemployment in the country.

The Mahatma supported decentralisation of production. He considered conditions which promoted the accumulation of capital ruinous for the country. In his opinion, concentration of industries in the cities was responsible for the ruin of the villages. Gandhi wanted the villages and the rural community to be revived by putting the towns at their service. He thought it necessary to retain only certain types of heavy industry which were absolutely essential. He said, moreover, that it was necessary to establish state ownership over all such industries. Through the state, people will be the owners of the products of their own labour.³⁸ In all other spheres Gandhi preferred co-operatives (though he did not

rule out individual production. He believed that, to the extent possible, all types of work should be conducted on a co-operative basis.³⁹

While wanting to remove exploitation which he considered as a form of violence Gandhi, at the same time, did not support forcible expropriation of property. When he was once asked what he thought about complete abolition of private property, he replied that by destroying the capitalists, the workers will deprive themselves of the hen that lays the golden eggs.⁴⁰ Similarly, he thought that it was more rational not to abolish landlordism. He wanted to improve it because, in his own words, "the man who supplies brains and money is as much a tiller as the one who labours with his hands."⁴¹

Gandhi was against expropriation not because he was an "agent" of the exploiting classes, as was often stated. He had different reasons for holding this opinion. In the first place, he took into consideration the low cultural level of the basic mass of the Indian working people, the majority of whom, being illiterate, could simply not become independent producers. Secondly, he was against any kind of violence, even if it was sought to be justified by noble aims. He considered the path of consistent reform, personal and collective improvement, superior not only from the moral point of view, but also more productive and effective. In the Mahatma's view, gradual removal of private property was possible through trusteeship. To his impatient opponents, who thought that this type of transformation was too slow, Gandhi replied,

The way to make the *kisāns* happy and prosperous is to educate them to know the reasons of their present condition and how to mend it. We may show them the non-violent or the violent way. The latter may look tempting, but it is

the way to perdition in the long run. Seemingly the longest process is often the shortest.⁴²

In the same way, in relations between the workers and the employers, Gandhi preferred peaceful settlement of disputes instead of confrontation. This does not mean that he was opposed to strikes in general. But he held recourse to legal means and arbitration more desirable. He considered the possibility of a strike only in extreme cases.

The Mahatma led a few strikes which ended successfully. When resorting to this means, he was guided by definite rules: Do not start a strike without appropriate preparation and do not use it for purely political purposes.⁴³ The latter is considered by Gandhi's critics as evidence of his "bourgeois nature." However, it seems that here too the Mahatma was guided purely by his thinking (which does not mean that he could not be mistaken on occasions). He did not say that strikes cannot be used for political ends but Gandhi believed that one does not need great intelligence to understand that it is extremely dangerous to use workers for political ends unless they understand the political situation in the country. The greatest contribution the workers can make to politics is to improve their own living conditions, to be informed, to insist on their rights and even to demand from the owners proper utilisation of the products in the manufacture of which they play such a vital role.

The main principles of the Gandhian concept of the ideal social order are non-violence and hard work. If the former is sufficiently well known, the significance of the latter is clearly underestimated. But it is precisely in his attitude to work that we see with special clarity the reformist — one may even say the revolutionary — spirit of Gandhism.

As we have already said, in traditional Hindu society, according to the Hindu religion, priests, warriors and traders belonged to the upper, twice-born *varṇas*. The *sūdras*, i.e.

those who were engaged in physical labour, were considered representatives of the “lower” castes. Gandhi’s dream, however, was that all should become śūdras. Referring to the authority of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, Gandhi asserted that it “contained the teaching of labour, of *bhakti* or devotion, of *jñāna* or knowledge. Life must be a harmonious integrity of all three.”⁴⁴ The Mahatma did not see any difference in principle between religious salvation and worldly occupations. He assumed that self-sacrifice is nothing but labour in the sweat of one’s brow to earn one’s daily bread. Thus, for the Mahatma, an ideal person is not one who is a *sarīnyāsī* or ascetic, a monk living outside the world on alms, but a toiler who labours to improve earthly life.

In Indian culture there is the term *tapas* (literally, penance), inspired by religious fervour. We find the first mention of this in Vedic literature, in the *Ṛgveda* in particular. An ascetic who takes such a vow subjects himself to inconceivable trials; he spends many days surrounded by a ring of burning fires or under the burning sun in the hottest season of the year, standing on his legs for many years, and so on. Gandhi calls upon people to undergo *tapas* of a new type, which would lead to individual perfection and to the transformation of society.

The Mahatma experimented with collective forms of *tapas*. The first experiment of this sort was the foundation by him of the Phoenix settlement (not far from Durban in South Africa).

The idea of founding this colony, in which collective self-restraint was expected to lead to common living, appeared to Gandhi under the “magic spell” of John Ruskin’s book, *Unto This Last*. This work by the British art critic and publicist contained a romantic critique of capitalism, which could be overcome by means of aesthetic and moral education of man “in the spirit of religion and beauty.” In

this book, Gandhi — in his own words — “discovered” some of his deepest convictions. “That is why I was so captivated by it and why it brought about an instant transformation in my life.”⁴⁵ This is how the Mahatma sums up the basic teachings of Ruskin’s book:

1. That the good of the individual is contained in the good of all.
2. That a lawyer’s work has the same value as the barber’s, inasmuch as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work.
3. That a life of labour, i.e. the life of the tiller of the soil and handicraftsman, is the life worth living.⁴⁶

Gandhi decided to start realising these principles. With those who shared his views — people who collaborated with him in his paper *Indian Opinion* published in Transvaal since 1904 — he acquired in Phoenix 100 acres of land. Each family of settlers received a plot of three acres so that they might have the opportunity of making their living through physical labour. The people gave their spare time to working in the press which published *Indian Opinion*. All those who worked for the paper, irrespective of their racial or national origin, received the same monthly allowance — three pounds. Life in the Phoenix settlement was simple, democratic, ascetic and full of intensive labour.

This experiment was further developed in the Tolstoy Farm founded in 1910. An important reason for its organisation was the need to support the families of the *satyāgrahīs* arrested in Johannesburg. The farm was bought by Gandhi’s associate, the German architect, Hermann Kallenbach. It was named after Leo Tolstoy as a mark of their admiration for his religious and philosophical views. In Gandhi’s own words, during the first years of his life in South Africa he made an “intensive” study of such of Tolstoy’s works as *The Gospels in Brief* and *What to Do?* But

it was the Russian writer's *The Kingdom of God is Within You* which made the strongest impression on him.⁴⁷ On 1 October 1909, Gandhi wrote his first letter to the great Russian writer. In this letter, he drew Tolstoy's attention to the movement of "passive resistance" in Transvaal and asked his opinion about the ethics of conducting a competition for an article on the effectiveness of passive resistance which could help popularise the aims and methods of the movement.

Gandhi's second letter to Tolstoy was dated 4 April 1910, which he sent along with his book *Hind Swaraj*, or "Indian Home Rule." A note in Tolstoy's diary shows that this booklet left a positive impression on the Russian writer. On 19 April 1910, he noted in his diary:

This morning two Japanese came, wild people, moved to rapture by European civilisation. But from an Indian I received a book and a letter which show an understanding of all the shortcomings of European civilisation, even all its worthlessness.⁴⁸

In his reply, Tolstoy wrote from Yasnaya Polyana:

I read your book with the greatest interest, as I think that the question that you discuss in it — passive resistance — is a question of vital importance not only for India but also for all mankind.⁴⁹

And finally, Leo Tolstoy received letters from Hermann Kallenbach and Gandhi at the same time in August 1910. Kallenbach informed him about the founding of the Tolstoy Farm, given to the "head of the Indian colony in South Africa," i.e. Gandhi "for the needs of the non-resisters and their families" and promised "to make every effort to live up to the ideas which you (Tolstoy M.S.) have so fearlessly placed before the world."⁵⁰

In his third and last letter, Gandhi wrote to Tolstoy that "no other writings have left such a strong impression

on Kallenbach" as Tolstoy's and therefore he took the liberty, after consulting Gandhi, to name the farm in Tolstoy's honour as a stimulus to further efforts to achieve the same ideals "which the writer had put forward before the world."⁵¹

The correspondence ends with Tolstoy's letter of 7 September 1910 which Gandhi received a few days before the great non-resister's death. It says, in part,

Your work in Transvaal, as it appears to me at this end of the world, is work which is the most central, most important of all causes which are at present being pursued in the world and in which the people, not only of the Christian but of the entire world will inevitably take part.⁵²

In its organisers' conception, the Tolstoy Farm was to become a prototype of the social organisation of the future. It was a kind of a commune whose members carried out various experiments on themselves — experiments of self-denial — for educating and strengthening their spirit. Thus they observed all possible fasts in the belief that for those whose minds are working towards self-restraint dietetic restrictions are very helpful. In fact, without their help lust cannot be completely rooted out of the mind.⁵³ But the chief motive of abstention was the desire "to live the life of the poorest people."⁵⁴

Another type of experimentation was Gandhi's experiments in the sphere of education. Gandhi believed that only parents can give their children ideal education. Therefore, he looked upon the farm as a kind of a "family" and upon himself as the father of the family. The fundamental thing in Gandhi's system of education was labour, physical labour in the first place. There were no servants in the farm. All work — beginning with cooking and ending with sweeping off dirt — was done by the farm inhabitants. Children took part to the extent possible in all types of labour. Gandhi later recalled:

On Tolstoy Farm, we had made it a rule that the youngsters should not be asked to do what the teachers did not do, and therefore, when they were asked to do any work, there was always a teacher co-operating and actually working with them.⁵⁵

Not more than three hours a day was spent on subjects of general education. Moreover, teaching was mostly oral, because Gandhi believed that the teacher is the real "textbook" for his pupils.⁵⁶

Spiritual education was a much more difficult matter. Gandhi was of the opinion that "To develop the spirit is to build character and to enable one to work towards a knowledge of God and self-realisation."⁵⁷ In contrast to the generally accepted tradition of giving oneself up to self-realisation during the fourth phase of life, that is, on the doorstep of one's death, the Mahatma believed that "those who defer preparation for this invaluable experience until the last stage of life, attain not self-realisation but old age, amounting to a second and pitiable childhood."⁵⁸ Gandhi emphasised the need to educate one's spirit from an early age through "exercises," the choice of which depended wholly upon the way of life and character of the teacher.

These experiments in educating the spirit and collective living were continued in the *āśrama* organised by Gandhi and his followers in different parts of India.

Gandhi gave a new meaning to an *āśrama*. His *āśrama* was a place for collective self-improvement which was practised in order to transform worldly life. The *āśrama* was looked upon as a model of an ideal social structure, where all were equal, where there was no violence and where love reigned. Here there were no teachers and no taught. Here "family" relations were the rule.

Gandhi practised collective prayers of universal significance. For example, during the evening prayers it was the practice to read the last nineteen verses from the second

chapter of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, which called for ascetic self-restraint, self-control and non-violence.⁵⁹

All Wars are Evil

The ideal of a non-violent civilisation can be attained only if there is a fundamental change in the character of international relations. For achieving this, Gandhi dreamed of creating a world government — at least a world union of free nations which would put an end to colonial oppression, guaranteeing the equality of all nations by preventing aggression and exploitation of some nations by others, protecting national minorities and pooling the world's resources for the sake of universal well-being.⁶⁰ He stressed the need for creating a world order that would be free from exploitation, would be based on the principles of equality of rights, mutual respect and co-operation of all nations. There is no doubt that in such a civilisation there would be no place for any kind of aggression. Gandhi believed that any war, of necessity, is evil. At the same time, he acknowledged the necessity of making a distinction between aggressors and those who take up arms because of being victims of aggression.

It is extremely important to note the position Gandhi adopted when the atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He did not see any justification for this action. Japan was guilty of committing crimes to achieve its unworthy ambitions, "but the unworthiness conferred no right on the less unworthy (Gandhi has in view the USA) of destroying without mercy men, women and children of Japan." Gandhi sees the tragedy of what had happened and felt that the atomic bomb had violated "the laws of war" which had guided people for centuries, and more importantly, it "destroyed the soul" of Japan and the United States, because one cannot put down violence by counter-

violence: counter-hatred only increases the surface as well as the depth of hatred.⁶¹

Gandhi spoke up for disarmament and called upon the great powers to set an example by deciding unilaterally to give up militarisation.

No doubt, preaching love as a norm of behaviour in international relations may appear naïve. The Mahatma himself admitted that a long time will be needed for the laws of love to be accepted in international affairs.⁶² All the same, he predicted that people would gradually and definitely move towards acknowledging the truth that “force does not solve any problems.”

Non-violent Civilisation: Utopia or Ideal?

Non-violence is the ideological credo of Gandhism. This credo is not limited to the task of achieving national liberation for India or the radical reorganisation of Indian society on the basis of a re-interpretation of religious traditions. It has a universal dimension as, in the final analysis, it is directed towards the achievement of a world-wide non-violent civilisation.

Is the Gandhian project for the future then the brainwave of an Utopian or an insightful perception of a world order which may be far away, but still possible as a matter of principle?

There are many who think of Gandhi's scheme as a Utopian conception which is archaic for our times and which is oriented towards preserving pre-capitalist community relations. Such arguments are not without basis. There are more than enough reasons for such a view if one looks at the statements made by Gandhi about machine production, about modern means of transport and energy, about towns which Gandhi saw as nothing more than “appendages of the village,” about the monetary system and

trade which he wanted reduced to inter-community natural exchange, etc. In fact, Gandhi can appear as the precursor of a modern social phenomenon which has become especially evident during the last decade. We have in view "fundamentalism" or "revivalism" of the Islamic, Hindu or other varieties. It represents in the Third World countries not only a broad but often a dominating socio-political trend.

The crash of hopes about the possibility of rapid economic progress after the achievement of political sovereignty, the failure of attempts to raise the country to the modern level of production by imitating Western models of development, stimulate the search for "national" models of social progress, give rise to idealisation of the past and to hopes that success would be achieved through the re-establishment of traditional values and institutions. "Revivalism" is a kind of reaction opposed to Western-oriented modernisation. That is not all. It is also, in fact, a sign of the reformation process directed towards the expression of internal impulses of development which would allow traditional societies to attain modern levels of living. Everyone who loves India, Gandhi believed, must stick to ancient Indian civilisation, as a child to the mother's breast. Healthy growth is possible only when one has strong roots which are fed by the life-giving juices of one's own soil.⁶³ Gandhi's "revivalism," however, is different from the movements to which we have just referred.

Gandhi's revivalism is absolutely free of national egoism. The Mahatma considered only that to be morally justifiable which does not harm the interests of others. He said that when the interests of someone's country do not conflict with the interests of the world, serving the cause of his country leads a man to *mokṣa*.⁶⁴ Gandhi based his internationalism on his conviction that mankind is one. God

is “the sum total” of all souls, “we have but one soul,” he liked to repeat.⁶⁵

One of the main features of Gandhi’s reformism is the fact that — being born out of Indian reality — it is oriented towards the transformation of the human community as a whole. Looking at this “universal” nature of Gandhism, his first biographer wrote:

I question whether any system can absolutely hold him. His views are too closely allied to Christianity to be entirely Hindu, and too deeply saturated with Hinduism to be called Christian, while his sympathies are so wide and catholic that one would imagine he has reached a point where the formulae of sects are meaningless.⁶⁶

The Mahatma himself, in his outer appearance and in his use of terms, concepts and symbols of Hinduism, constantly demonstrated his inseparable link with Indian culture. At the same time, he never tired of insisting on the unity of mankind. Man’s ultimate aim is the realisation of God, and all his acts, social, political, religious, have to be guided by the ultimate aim of the vision of God.

The only way to find God is to see him in His creation and be one with it. This can only be done by service to all. I am a part and parcel of the whole, and I cannot find Him apart from the rest of humanity.⁶⁷

Gandhi’s view of the future is not a linear, hierarchical representation of progress. It is in harmony with the most contemporary ideas. Two years before his death Gandhi wrote:

Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But, it will be an oceanic circle, whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance, but ever humble, sharing

the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units.

Therefore, the outmost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle, but will give strength to all within and will derive its own strength from it.⁶⁸

What is this? Is it an Utopia or a prophecy? Was not his attachment to the ideal of non-violence the most tragic error committed by the Mahatma? Does not the history of India and Gandhi's own personal end, so full of drama, prove the hopelessness of the non-violent method of attaining one's goal, which he always defended?

Let us recall the great price India had to pay for her Independence — the Partition of the country on a communal basis and the creation of Pakistan in 1947. The Partition was accompanied by cruel communal riots. Gandhi's calls for religious tolerance and brotherhood more and more often evoked the harsh slogan (from both the Hindus and the Muslims) "*Gandhi Murdabad!*" — Death to Gandhi! And then on 30 January 1948, when Gandhi came out to meet the people during his evening prayer, a man emerged from the crowd and pumped three bullets into him at point-blank range. Independence could not be gained without bloodshed.

The embitterment of the people led to raging communal riots and the death of hundreds of thousands of people. The preacher of *ahimsā* was himself assassinated.

Then were Gandhi's asceticism and the ideals he preached all in vain?

An answer to this question is important not only for an evaluation of the historical events of the past. Without an answer to this question, the present generation cannot live with a clean conscience.

Gandhi himself provided an absolutely clear and categorical answer. Foreseeing a tragic end, he wrote on 15 June 1947:

There is no hope for the aching world except through the narrow and straight path of non-violence. Millions like me may fall to protect the truth in their own lives; that would be their failure, not of the eternal law.⁶⁹

But are we really justified in considering the Gandhian experiment a complete failure? Did the Mahatma not awaken the self-respect of his compatriots? Did he not imbue them — those who were forgotten, disarmed and bereft of hope — with faith in their power, in their ability to overcome evil? Did he not succeed in uniting them into a mighty liberating force, irrespective of their caste, class and religion? Was he not able to disarm many of his opponents by the example of his “suffering without vengeance”? And finally, did he not provide inspiration to the non-violent anti-racist movements in the USA and Africa and to the struggle for peace in the East, West, North and South?

To those lacking foresight, Gandhi will remain a hopeless idealist. But a penetrating mind will judge him as a “dreamer with his feet firmly planted in the ground.” Being a hard realist himself, the Mahatma acknowledged the unreality of the complete triumph of the idea of non-violence in the near future. “I know that the progress of non-violence is seemingly a terribly slow process,” he wrote in 1939, “but experience has taught me that it is the surest way to the common goal. Violence, even for vindication of justice is almost played out. With that belief I am content to plough my lonely furrow, if it is to be my lot that I have no sharer in the out-and-out belief in non-violence.”⁷⁰

The “bankruptcy” (in Gandhi’s own expression) of the politics of non-violence in India was in the Mahatma’s view not due to any fault in the concept as such. It was due to the fact that “non-violence of India’s struggle was only in name — in reality, it was passive resistance of the weak who were incapable of armed resistance.”⁷¹ Non-violent resistance will,

in Gandhi's view, become "the strongest force in the world" when people take recourse to it out of conviction. It will then turn into the non-violence of the strong.⁷²

Gandhi also soberly assessed the prospects for realising his design of a non-violent civilisation. Two years before his death, he wrote, referring to *Rām Rājya*:

I may be taunted with the retort that this is all Utopian and, therefore, not worth a single thought. If Euclid's point, though incapable of being drawn by any human agency, has an imperishable value, my picture has its own for the mankind to live. Let India live for this true picture, though never realisable in its completeness.⁷³

A non-violent civilisation, in fact, appears to be a Utopia. The movement of history is irresistible. Conservation of the past (the village community, rural civilisation, patriarchal family, and so on), however strong the nostalgia for it, is neither possible nor desirable. In this sense *Rām Rājya* may appear to contradict social progress.

Notwithstanding all this, the Gandhian design has also its positive features. It touches on the "sore points" of industrial civilisation, it is imbued with a critical enthusiasm which exercises a sobering, healthy influence on those seeking ways of overcoming socio-economic backwardness by blindly imitating alien social models. The Gandhian critique can be fruitful also for those who live in materially prosperous countries but are still conscious of the need for improvement and for a movement for a better world, not only for the chosen few among nations but for mankind as a whole.

And, finally, what is most important, Gandhi discovered for himself and revived for others a universal value — respect for the sacred gift of life. A civilisation without violence is an ideal towards which we are all called upon to march untiringly, a lighthouse illuminating the path lest mankind perish in darkness.

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