

ASSORTMENTS OF SATYAGRAHA

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ABSTRACT

Through this research work, I will examine the characteristics and standard tools of Satyagraha of Gandhi. Satyagraha has been described in a variety of ways. Some people have equated it with compromise and the way of the coward. That Satyagraha is very different from compromise can be gauged from the fact that although agreement or consensus is an essential ingredient of the goal of Gandhian Satyagraha, in the process the Satyagrahi is never prepared to yield any position which he holds to be the truth. What results from the dialectical process of conflict of opposing standpoints as acted upon by Satyagraha, is a synthesis, not a compromise. While Gandhian philosophy does not exclude compromise as device for accommodating different positions till such point where basic principles have not been challenged, it is qualitatively different from compromise. Ideally, compromise proceeds in a manner which admits to sacrificing some portion of an initially held position in exchange for a similar sacrifice on the part of an opponent.

INTRODUCTION

Compromise differs from the direct-action techniques of Satyagraha in so far as no a satyagrahi is prepared at any time to sacrifice substantial elements of his position, unless he is persuaded that he is wrong in entertaining those views. Satyagraha is an elaborate technique, embracing a range of activities. Negotiation and accommodation may have a limited role to play in the early stages of Satyagraha. But Satyagraha is not barter. True satyagrahi, according to Gandhi, never makes extravagant claims for purposes of bargaining He may concede to the opponent minor

points, e.g. - in questions of his convenience or of opinion technical matters in return for similar concessions but the final stages of Satyagraha call for aggressive/concerted action, which takes it beyond the scope on of compromise. Satyagraha then is a generic nomenclature for a technique of conflict management. In any conflict situation there are always only three possibilities:

Lose Lose Technique:

These kind of conflict resolution techniques never really resolve issues. Both parties to the conflict lose out on the chance to resolve their differences permanently. A very common example of this technique is that of avoidance - trying to eliminate conflict by denying it exists. The only advantage of this technique lies in the fact that it is able to postpone a confrontation between two groups. But there is always the possibility of a major controversy between the groups breaking out because the conflict has only been ignored, not analysed, and resolved. Win Lose Technique:

This is ultimately a strategy by which one party gains at the expense of another. Since such a technique pits one group against another, it probably increased tension rather than resolving it. A good example of a Win-Lose technique of conflict resolution is that where a group X forces y to accept whatever solution they impose. The use of this technique is usually justified through the ethic of "good loser", which is spelled (1) In disagreement there must be a winner and a loser. (2) The loser is not going to be me, so you will have to lose. (3) Loser can make trouble. I will tell you that you are bad (or evil) if you complain about your loss. Although a Win-Lose technique settles an issue quickly and finally, it has the disadvantage that it can lead to sabotage or resistance when the loser does not like the final decision. War is an instance of win lose technique of conflict resolution, where only one side can emerge victorious and usually not for long, since wars have tendency to drag on, and often the loss in manpower and to the exchequer is not commensurate with the a gains or spoils of war.

In direct and sharp contrast to the Lose-Lose and win-Lose techniques of conflict resolution, there is a third and more comprehensive technique that of Win-Win. This is a technique wherein both parties to the conflict emerge with their dignity and self-respect unscathed, and each feeling they have gained substantially from the transaction, Gandhi's Satyagraha falls within this category of conflict resolution in so far as Gandhi never sought to humiliate or denigrate his adversary, but with love and humility make him realize the wrongness of his deeds. The basic advantage of this

method is increased mutual understanding and commitment to the proposed solution. Moreover, there are no loses, thus minimizing the chances for further conflict. Satyagraha as technique of action conflict resolution is characterised by adherence to a stated truth by means of behavior which is nonviolent.

Elsewhere in this part we had referred to Satyagraha as the "moral equivalent of war". While war turns on physical pressure, Satyagraha too amounts to waging a war against the forces of injustice and untruth through bringing moral pressure to bear on the opponent. Being a "moral equivalent of war", there is no room for cowardice in Satyagraha. It is not abstaining from violence due to fear but due to reasoned conviction. Satyagraha in fact calls for great mental and physical preparedness. Like any other war campaign, Satyagraha as a corporate action involves besides the moral apparatus, in-depth consideration of the questions of organisation, discipline and training, each of which have been dealt with at length by Gandhi.

Gandhi envisaged a pivotal role for the leader. A leader (as the embodiment of nonviolent values) is supposed to guide, and inspire his followers. His followers must have implicit faith in his judgement and obey every command without mental reservation. That Gandhi's Satyagraha is not on par with passive resistance, nor is it the quality of the weak or coward, can be gathered from the rigorous discipline and training involved in the making of a Satyagrahi. "It involves self-sacrifice and the readiness to bear endless suffering bravely. It is open, voluntary, not embarked upon lightly or without adequate preparation. It is not to be abused; it has to be exercised by well qualified, well-prepared people who are devoted to truth, nonviolence and the welfare of all, and who are capable of exercising great patience and forbearance. Such qualities these minimise the risk of violence. It is rooted and grounded in the efficiency of innocent suffering.

Taking inspiration from Patanjali's *Astānga* Yoga, or eight steps of mental purification - *cittaśuddhi*, [consisting of external purification and mental purification), which can be expressed as follows:

- I.Yama (Abstention), *ahimsa*, *asatya*, *brahmacharya*, *asteya*, and *aparigraha*, (nonviolence, abstain from falsehood, abstain from lust, stealing and avarice)
- II.Niyama (Self Culture) external and internal purification (*Saucha*), contentment (*Santosa*) *austerity*(*tapas*), study (*Svadhyaya*), and devotion to god (*Isvara pranidhana*)
- III.Asana (comfortable and steady posture)
- IV.Pranayama (Control of breath)
- V.Pratyāhāra (Control of senses)
- VI. Dharana (Fixing of mind on object of meditation)
- VII.Dhyāna (undisturbed flow of thought round the object of meditation)
- VIII.Samadhi (Concentration) – liberation.,

Gandhi too feels that for the final stage of liberation, (from the shackles of slavery), the freedom fighter has to equip himself mentally, physically, psychologically and emotionally. Towards this end he should take the Vows of poverty (*aparigraha*), nonviolence (*ahimsa*), chastity (*brahmacharya*). obedience, and dieting. We shall now see how closely akin the training of a Satyagrahi is to that of a soldier, thus belying the charge of cowardice.

We have already spoken of Ahimsa at length elsewhere in this part and need not dwell any longer on it. Coming to non-possession/poverty or *aparigraha*, we note Gandhi intoning that no Satyagrahi should think of the morrow nor stock provisions but have faith that his creature comforts will somehow be met. The rationale behind this has echoes of Platonisms, where, in • the REPUBLIC Plato forbade Guardians from possessing any property or any family of their own. The reason behind this apparently cruel injunction was that these persons who were defenders of the nation must be allowed to carry out their task without fear of enemy reprisals against their family and property. Remove these, we remove the fetters of terror, leading to greater efficiency in action. i.e., The Satyagrahi must not identify himself with anything, nothing belongs to him. Gandhi gave the metaphor a deeper significance through emphasizing that the Satyagrahi should not regard even his own body as his possession, but only a tool/vehicle dedicated to the service of the motherland. Such individuals will not be afraid to die for a noble cause. Soldiers too (never cowards) are made of such stern stuff. Individual aspirations must be sublimated and integrated into the larger interest - that of the welfare of the nation. The vow of *aparigraha* leads

onto another vow of chastity (*Brahmacharya*). Reams upon reams of paper have been filled with speculations, analysis and critiques of Gandhi's treatment of Brahmacharya, his prudish thoughts on the *raison d'etre* of sex and his embarrassing experiments to test his own will power in this respect. One could go on arguing *ad nauseum* about Gandhian treatment of Brahmacharya and celibacy, but I will not do so, for the reason that all this is mere polemics and sophistry. Brahmacharya means lot than sexual control. Mahatma Gandhi believed that celibacy gave an ideal physical strength and moral elevation to a Satyagrahi. His/her purity of thought would generate in him/her feelings for leading a pure and disciplined life which would enable him/her to achieve success in all spheres of life. Chastity, according to Gandhi made memory sharp, brain fertile and body energetic. If for a moment we put aside Gandhi's flowery and poetic style of presentation and concentrate on the time or historical epoch in which he lived, we will be able to grasp the true significance of Brahmacharya. It would not be out of place to point out here that Gandhi was no armchair pontificator, but an intensely practical and active individual who instilled and infused in his band of followers the burning zeal for independence. Swaraj and Swaraj alone was the goal, Satyagraha/ Ahimsa/ nonviolence, the means, everything else - family, wealth et al, was incidental or secondary.

In my opinion Gandhi could not have advocated strict celibacy for all Indians who wished to do something out of the ordinary (as is commonly attributed to him), for this would not have been in keeping with Indian socio-cultural traditions. Erudite scholars and seers like *Vyasa*, *Parasurama*, *Kashyapa* and *Janaka* were not celebrates, nor were they wasters. Even Mahatma Gandhi himself as a leader of the masses was no celebrate as amply borne out in his Autobiography and graphic accounts of his experiments with members of the opposite sex (to test his willpower). He viewed Brahmacharya as an important component of living a higher form of life.

Madhu Kishwar bears me out on this point when she says "Gandhiji's obsession and experiment with sexual abstinence should not be dismissed as mere product of personal eccentricity. His 'self-control and brahmacharya were not mere clap trap of life - denying asceticism with a moralistic facade But Gandhi tried literally to transcend his sexuality and to make it contribute to forging the powerful, modern political weapon of satyagraha, he experimented with these ideas as part of his social revolution and vision of a new man-woman relationship". His ideas on control of

sexuality served to galvanise women to break the mold of stereotypes, and leave hearth and home to live away from home without fear of exploitation, and participate in greater causes.

Madhu Kishwar is of the opinion that Gandhi's abhorrence for sex and consequent advocacy of celibacy has a lot to do with the influence of the Indian ascetic tradition wherein *munis* and *tapasvis* were believed to acquire extraordinary powers through abstinence. He was well aware of how hoary seers like *Viswamitra* lost the fruits of their *tapasya* because they failed to overcome lust! Picturing himself in a similar situation, it appears that he was keen to see that he did not meet such an end, and surrounded himself with temptation in the form of young women, testing himself in a radical and often unorthodox manner.

Gandhi's treatment of Brahmacharya bears close resemblance to Plato's Republic where the Greek philosopher laid strict injunctions on the Guardians of the state, that they were not to possess anything, property nor family. The two differ only in so far as Gandhi wishes to reduce sex to the bare minimum - only for procreation, while Plato sundering the traditional family bonds advocated state arranged matrimonial alliances of which the resultant off springs would be brought up at state expense in creches away from the biological parents, who were left free to carry out their duties as before. That in my view, is what Gandhi too is trying to say under the grab of 'celibacy'. He is pressing home the point that Satyagrahis (those who have taken upon themselves the task of liberating their motherland) should work with single minded devotion to this end, to the exclusion of everything else.

Freedom fighters and partisans are never canonised nor revered by their foes, they are always on the run; in such a situation, a wife and family would only be a hinderance, ("He who hath wife and children hath given hostages to fortune' (Bacon) and could instill fear in the hearts of patriots, and be used as a weapon against them for there is hardly any person who will not surrender when he notices his near and dear ones harassed. If he/she has nobody and no possessions of his/her own, there is nothing to bind him/her down. He/she is free to serve the nation to the best of his/her ability (this is true of any activity). The only way a person can remain unshackled is to cease to think on the lives of having a family etc. This form of mental renunciation is what Gandhi calls Brahmacharya and is a prerequisite for *asteya aparigraha* etc, for unless one is mentally detached, he/she cannot physically renounce anything.

We need only study the etymology of the term "Brahmacharya" in order to grasp its real significance. Brahmacharya' consists of two words 'brahma' and *acharana*'; the term means 'Brahma ka *acharana*' or following the path of the Lord, gaining in strength, valour, purity, and glory. This is a concept which is applicable to any field of action and bears close resemblance to Sankara's Brahma Sutra *Bhasya* (1.1.1), ब्रह्म विज्ञानसूत्रेण wherein he discusses the *sadhana - catusthi*. Brahmacharya can be likened to *viveka* and *vairāga*. First, we discriminate/choose our path i.e., select our goal from a number of alternatives available. No value judgement involved no sin in choosing a lower less comprehensive goal instead of a loftier one, once having selected the goal we have to discipline ourselves to follow the path/means, to reach that goal i.e. the path of ahimsa. In order to do this, we have to renounce everything else and apply ourselves with whole hearted devotion to the task at hand. This is *vairaga*. Following *vairaga*, one must equip oneself psycho-physically to face the challenges may confront us in the course of the long march to the cherished ideal. Having a burning zeal to achieve self set goal, (*mumukshatvam*), the Satyagrahi must control his mental waves and physical sense organs and develop for bearance as also the ability to bravely withstand suffering (*titiksha*), without abandoning the path on letting one's zeal flag. This is *shutsampatihi*.

Discipline does not mean merely abstaining from sex, but control of all the senses. Gandhi is not averse to indulgence, but to overindulgence, nobody should sacrifice long term goals for the sake of fleeting pleasures of the body. This brings us to the third quality of diet. Though much can be written about the intimate relation between diet and human personality, the present thesis is not the appropriate forum, and I shall simply pass this by, by stating that Gandhi was deeply aware of the effect different kinds of food had on people. Like a farsighted field marshal, the Mahatma could for see the trials and tribulations his followers were going to face in the future and wanted to toughen them, consequently he advocated a simple diet replete with the necessary nutrients but not fanciful or highly spiced and exotic. Again, food was meant to nourish and build the body not to be injected as a pleasant way of passing time. By obedience, Gandhi meant obeying and abiding by the rules of ahimsa. The satyagrahi must have faith in his cause in the justness of his demand, and then never swerve from the path till such time as he attains his objective.

CONCLUSION

Thus, that Satyagraha is not synonymous with the languor of cowardice is amply displayed in the fact that it distinguishes between people and systems. It is reason strengthened by suffering, and only a brave man who has his wits around him even in a crisis situation can reason, cowards blindly flee. Gandhi drawing inspiration from Indian mythology wherein awesome robbers like an Angulimara and Valmiki could reform with the latter going on to pen the epic Ramayana, contends that systems may be evil but people are never beyond redemption. They can, if they so desire, change their lot through self-effort. At no time must impute unworthy motives to them. Extremely utopian as this may sound, it is we desirable in so far as it creates a charitable understanding and opens up the way to conversion through what Gandhi called 'a constant appeal to the head and the heart'.

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