

## Revisiting Gandhi's Philosophy: A Quest for Global Peace



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**ABSTRACT:** More than three dozen conflicts are presently ongoing throughout the world. Of these, six have been converted into major wars, viz.: Yemeni Civil War, Mexican Drug War, Afghanistan Conflict, Myanmar Conflict, Ethiopian Civil War and the Russia-Ukraine War. Innocent citizens of these countries, including women and children, are being brutally killed in these conflicts. War leads to disaster. And after the holocaust one tends to preserve what is left behind and creates, once again, what has been destroyed. Ultimately, the end sufferers of the war going countries are its guiltless citizens. Solution to the above-mentioned violent conflicts lies in the Gandhian philosophy based on its four major principles, viz.: satya (truth), ahimsa (non-violence), satyagraha and sarvodaya. There is little scope for greed, lie, hatred, and urge for power, violence and possessiveness in Gandhian philosophy. After all when shall man realize that he is not immortal. Man has to realize that the mentality for more than required material possessiveness is the root cause of poverty and starvation. Wealth earned throughout life cannot be carried after death. The aforesaid chaos and conflict, which the world faces today is because man is running blindly in quest for the attainment of material gains and for the acquisition of absolute power. This selfish quest for money and power attracts jealousy and hatred from all corners ultimately resulting into grievous conflicts. And, therefore, Gandhi propagated in favour of non-possessiveness and detachment from material things. The world has had enough of bloodshed for the establishment of a so called just order, i.e., based on freedom and democracy, especially after the II World War. It is high time these conflicting countries realize that peace is indivisible and so is freedom and both together co-exist and are indivisible too.

**KEYWORDS:** *Satya* (truth), *ahimsa* (non-violence), *satyagraha* and *sarvodaya*, Gandhian, philosophy, oligarchy, fearlessness, unimpeachable evidence, unflinching faith.

### INTRODUCTION

The fact that there are so many men still alive in the world shows that it is based not on the force of arms, but on the force of truth or love. Therefore, the greatest and the most unimpeachable evidence of the success of this force is to be found in the fact that, in spite of wars of the world, it still lives on.

Thousands, indeed tens of thousands, depend for their existence on a very active working of this force. Little quarrels of millions of families in their daily lives disappear before the exercise of this force. Hundreds of nations live in peace. History does not and cannot take note of this fact. History is really a record of every interruption of the even working of the force or love of the soul. . . . History then is a record of an interruption of the course of Nature; Soul-force, being natural, is not noted in history. (Gandhi, Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule 74)

### Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi popularly known as Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948)

remains, even today, as an icon of global peace and brotherhood. More of a social reformer than a politician, he dedicated his whole life to the service of the suffering humanity. Truth and non-violence, being the cardinal principles in which he believed, practiced and stood for; he is rightly regarded as an apostle of love and peace in the entire world. But the question arises that despite his world-wide acceptability; the world has accepted and applauded his principles only theoretically. Had the world followed his principles (as the Indians followed during their struggle for Indian independence and got India free from British imperialism) there would not have occurred so much of violence in the world as is being witnessed in the present times.

More than three dozen conflicts are presently ongoing throughout the world. Of these, six have been converted into major wars, viz.: Yemeni Civil War, Mexican Drug War, Afghanistan Conflict, Myanmar Conflict, Ethiopian Civil War and the Russia-Ukraine War.

- (i) The Yemeni Civil War, which began in 2014 and has taken more than 140000 lives, has occurred between the Rashid al-Alimi- led Yemeni Government and Houthi Armed Movement led by President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi. Saudi Arabia has also intervened in this war in support of Hadi.

## Revisiting Gandhi's Philosophy: A Quest for Global Peace

- (ii) Mexican Drug War which has occurred between the Government of Mexico and drug cartels has consumed more than 300000 lives in the past 15 years.
- (iii) Afghanistan War between Taliban and other factions has experienced more than 2700 casualties.
- (iv) Myanmar War between Tatmadaw (country's military) and Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy since 2021 coup continues till date and has claimed more than 20000 lives, as is estimated.
- (v) Ethiopia Civil War in which Eritrea has also got involved is a clash between two rival political groups in Ethiopia and has claimed more than 9000 casualties.
- (vi) Russia- Ukraine War, it is estimated, has claimed more than 20000 lives.

Besides, violent conflicts still continue in Sudan, Congo, Chad, Nigeria, Libya, Syria and a few more countries so to say. The bone of contention in the above stated conflicts, claiming lives of thousands of innocent people, is between the rival groups from inside the nation, primarily fighting to gain absolute power and control. Unlike, Russia-Ukraine War is between two countries. Scenes of terror and horror have become the common order of the day in these nations. Men, women and children are being brutally killed for the sake of gaining absolute power, that too, by force. At a time, when the world is moving forward with great pace, scientific discoveries have exerted unimaginable influence on the human mind leading to their occupying of an altogether new lifestyle, some countries or rather some individuals sitting at the helm of affairs in their nations and thinking of themselves to be immortal have plunged their nations into the river-pool of blood and violence. The world has had enough bloodshed for the establishment of a just order, i.e., based on freedom and democracy, especially after the II World War. It is high time these conflicting countries realize that peace is indivisible and so is freedom and both together co-exist and are indivisible too.

The concept of a country cannot be separated from the concept of life. A country exists because life in that country exists. The question then becomes pertinent that how can a country think of its existence by killing its own people or for that matter by killing people of another country, either in the name of religious dogmatic beliefs or practices or for the sake of gaining power or for making profit? Rule by force is the rule of the jungle applicable upon animals because God has deprived them of action (*karma*). God has given the power to act only to man; action, for the betterment and welfare of not only human beings but for the welfare of all creatures including nature and environment. The concept of freedom and liberty based on democracy is the key to peaceful co-existence and mutual harmony between the different countries of the world at large. It is believed that before the development of democracy in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC by Athens, freedom and liberty has existed in the Indian subcontinent too. But monarchy, tyranny, aristocracy and oligarchy dominated the scene until the II World War which finally brought the dismantling of the empire. Many countries, including India, adopted the democratic form of governance after independence. And, subsequently, the growth and development of these countries provide evidence to the success of this form of governance.

Mahatma Gandhi was one of the key pillars who fought for and promoted this form of governance in the globe. If the world wishes to promote peace and brotherhood and a just order today then it will have to follow the principles as enunciated by Mahatma Gandhi, both in letter and spirit. Let us examine these principles with a view to understand Gandhi's philosophy.

Beginning to conduct his experiments for freedom and liberty in South Africa from 1893 to 1914, Gandhi came back to India with a clear concept and unflinching faith in his philosophy based primarily on four cardinal principles, viz. *satya* (truth), *ahimsa* (non-violence), *satyagraha* and *sarvodaya*.

These principles were not new to Indians. These were already present in the preaching of Mahavir and Buddha. These were elucidated by Maharshi Patanjali too in ancient India. The Jain religion promotes five essential vows to be undertaken by its followers: *satya* (truth), *ahimsa* (non-violence), *asteya* (non-stealing), *brahmacharya* (chastity) and *aparigraha* (non-attachment) for *Moksha* (spiritual liberation). Gandhi's originality lies in the application of these vows in political field; the use of these vows for political gains; the use of these vows for the establishment of a just order in the governance of different countries; the use of these vows for peaceful co-existence of all countries based on mutual trust and respect for each other's traditions, castes, religious beliefs and faith.

The word *satyagraha* was coined by Gandhiji during his struggle against the Asiatic Law Amendment Ordinance at Transvaal. He continued practicing this principle throughout his life. Though its literal meaning is to hold on to truth but can be better understood by demonstration. To hold on to truth requires great courage, fearlessness, self-control and determination. Violence has no space in its sphere. One has to practice patient self-suffering for the vindication of truth not by inflicting violence or suffering on the adversary but on oneself so as to win over one's adversary by the force of love. *Satyagraha* means fighting oppression through voluntary suffering. If the government is unjust and has passed or imposed an unreasonable law, the *satyagrahi* will not obey such a law. But he will not oppose that law by adopting violent means. He will oppose it peacefully by not subjecting himself to that law. Whatever punishment is awarded to the *satyagrahi* as a consequence, he will put up with it. Even if he is sent to jail he will live there happily. "*Satyagraha*," said Gandhi "is a priceless and matchless weapon, and that those who wield it are strangers to disappointment and defeat." (282)

The word *satya* is derived from '*sat*,' which means 'being.' Nothing is or exists in reality except Truth. That is why *sat* or Truth is perhaps the most important name of God. In fact it is more correct to say that Truth is God, than to say God is Truth. By truth Gandhi meant not only truthfulness in words, but truthfulness in thoughts also, and not only the relative truth of our conception, but the absolute truth, the Eternal Principle, that is God. He once said:

## Revisiting Gandhi's Philosophy: A Quest for Global Peace

I worship God as truth only. I have not yet found Him, but I am seeking after Him. I am prepared to sacrifice the things dearest to me in pursuit of this quest. Even if the sacrifice demanded me my very life, I hope I may be prepared to give it. But as long as I have not realized 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. ("The Gospel of Truth / The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi.")

*Ahimsa* (non-violence) for Gandhi was love not only for human beings but also for all creation. *Shloka* 71, Chapter 04 of *Maha Upanishad* provides the essence of *Sanatan* religion:

*Ayam Nijah paroveti garhna laghuchetsaam*

*Udarcharitanaam tu vasudhaiva Kutumbkam*

Narrow-minded people make calculations that this is mine and this is not mine but generous people accept the whole earth as one family. In other words narrow-minded people differentiate between man and man by saying that he is my brother, he is not my brother, but magnanimous people accept all creation to be belonging to one family. This ancient Indian philosophy highlights the idea that the entire world is one family meaning thereby that we should treat every creation with equality, dignity and with kindness and love.

Gandhi's philosophy of *ahimsa* was much in concordance with this philosophy of the *Sanatan* religion. *Ahimsa* does not only mean non-violence, as it has been made to appear in the crude sense. Not to hurt any living creation is of course a part of *ahimsa*. But even an evil thought, lying, hatred towards others, wishing ill to others also hurt the principle of *ahimsa*. From Yeravda Central prison in 1930, Gandhi reiterates his views on *ahimsa* thus:

In the place where we stand there are millions of micro-organisms to whom the place belongs, and who are hurt by our presence there. What should we do then? Should we commit suicide? Even that is no solution, if we believe, as we do, that so long as the spirit is attached to the flesh, on every destruction of the body it weaves for itself another. The body will cease to be only when we give up all attachments to it. This freedom from all attachments is the realization of God as Truth. Such realization cannot be attained in a hurry. The body does not belong to us. While it lasts, we must use it as a trust handed over to our charge. Treating in this way the things of the flesh, we may one day expect to become free from the burden of the body. Realizing the limitations of the flesh, we must strive day by day towards the ideal with what strength we have in us.

It is clear from the foregoing, that without *ahimsa* it is not possible to seek and find Truth. *Ahimsa* and Truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them. . . . Nevertheless *ahimsa* is the means; Truth is the end. Means to be means must always be within our reach, and so *ahimsa* is our supreme duty. If we take care of the means we are bound to reach the end sooner or later. . . . Whatever difficulties we encounter, whatever apparent reverses we sustain, we may not give up the quest for Truth which alone is, being God Himself. (148- 49)

The reader would excuse me for the length of the quotation which could not have been shortened looking to the clarity of thought contained in it and expressed by Gandhi himself related to the principles of Truth and non-violence and which became the most potent weapons which he used to emancipate India from the manacles of the British imperialistic powers.

Love for all things, is another state of *ahimsa*, which according to Gandhi, is the soul-force or the power of the Godhead within us. It is a positive state of love, of doing good even to the evil-doer. If I am a follower of *ahimsa*, then I must love my enemy. Gandhi used to say that hate the sin but not the sinner. But it does not mean helping the wrong doer. On the contrary, love or the active state of *ahimsa* requires you to dissociate yourself from the evil doer, even though it may offend him or injure him. Non-violence for Gandhi was the highest good of mankind, not only in the next world but in this also. J.B. Kriplani in his biography of Gandhi entitled, *Gandhi His Life and Thoughts* states and I quote:

Though a citizen of the world, he did not cease to be a nationalist. . . . He loved his nation as he loved every other nation. By his spiritual and moral dialectics he synthesized the idea of nationalism with that of universalism. To do this, as we have said before, his service of India was for the purpose that free India may be able to render service to humanity. He went so far to say that he would sacrifice India, if need be, for the good of the world. I wonder if others who claimed or claim to be the citizens of the world would go so far in their love of humanity! (428)

After briefly throwing light on the three principles of Gandhi's philosophy, i.e., *satyagraha*, *ahimsa* and *satya*, I come to the fourth, i.e., *sarvodaya*. The word *sarvodaya* is derived from Sanskrit language and is a combination of two words, "*sarva*" which means "all" and "*udaya*" which means "welfare" or "upliftment." Thus *sarvodaya* means the welfare of all or universal upliftment. *Sarvodaya* promotes a social order which envisages equality at all levels. Gandhi believed that the policy of the Government should be defined keeping in mind the person who stands on the last rung of social ladder. He believed that the true end of democracy cannot be attained unless it brings happiness for all. *Sarvodaya* stands for the progress of all. Though difficult to practice, the climax of *sarvodaya* rejects the possession of private property. It believes in trusteeship. Its object is the socio-economic development of all based on the foundations of truth, non-violence, self-sacrifice and purity.

It is surprising that at a time when war deaths are decreasing in the world civil war deaths are increasing. Deaths occur either because of organized crime primarily induced by drug cartels, gangs and mafia groups or due to repression by State forces on account of problems rose due to their mal-governance. Hunger for power and profit by greedy politicians, policemen, military men, officials, even judges in some of these countries result in their cooperation with the cartel heads and gangsters. State violence on the other

## Revisiting Gandhi's Philosophy: A Quest for Global Peace

hand too is claiming countless deaths. Taliban has finally captured the governance of Afghanistan on the basis of might and violence. North Korea, it is being reported is holding thousands of its citizens in concentration camps. Reports of State violence also come from Brazil. Nigerian military too, it is reported, is involved in the suppression and killing of its citizens numbering in a few thousands. All these and like issue are a matter of great concern to peace loving people of the world. The world needs to find some pragmatic solution to settle these conflicts so that deaths of the innocent people could be saved.

Solution to the above-mentioned violent conflicts lies in the Gandhian philosophy based on its four major principles as enunciated above. There is little scope for greed, lie, hatred, urge for power, violence and possessiveness in Gandhian philosophy. Man is not immortal. Man must realize that the mentality of more than required material possessiveness is the root cause of poverty and starvation. Wealth earned throughout life cannot be carried after death. The present chaos and conflict, the world over, is because one is running blindly in quest for the attainment of material gains and power. This selfish quest for money and power attracts jealousy and hatred from all corners ultimately resulting into grievous conflicts. And, therefore, Gandhi propagated in favour of non-possessiveness and detachment from material things. Raghavan Iyer in his book, *The Essentials of Mahatma Gandhi*, has published a letter of Gandhi written to Narandas Gandhi from Yeravda Mandir on August 26, 1930. The letter records a glimpse of Gandhi's views on non-possessiveness:

Our ignorance or negligence of the Divine Law, which gives a man from day to day his daily bread and no more, has given rise to inequalities with all the miseries attended upon them. The rich have a superfluous store of things which they do not need, and which are therefore neglected and wasted; while million starve to death for want of sustenance. If each retained possession only of what he needed, no one would be in want and all would live in contentment. As it is, the rich are discontented no less than the poor. The poor man would fain become a millionaire, and the millionaire a multi-millionaire. . . . The rich should take the initiative in dispossession with a view to universal diffusion of the spirit of contentment. If only they keep their own property within moderate limits, the starving will be easily fed and will learn the lesson of contentment along with the rich. (377-78)

Discontentment, whether between two countries or between rival groups inside the countries give rise to conflicts which if not subsided in time leads to bloody war. The problems of internal conflicts between the different countries seen today, primarily due to inequality, poverty, unemployment, unequal distribution of wealth, corrupt practices in public life, etc., is difficult to resolve unless the State works for the welfare of all. This can be accomplished only if the world revisits the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi.

Let me conclude with the speech delivered at the U.N. General Assembly, New York, 10 November, 1961, by Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, the most ardent follower of Mahatma Gandhi and which is as relevant even today:

.... the truth is that violence and hatred are bad- bad for individuals and bad for everybody. The great men of the world have been those who have fought hatred and violence and not those who have encouraged it—even in some supposedly worthwhile cause, and we have arrived at the stage where this, I feel, has to be checked. It really requires a new way of thinking, a new development of humanity. Possibly we are going through that process and possibly this very crisis will wake up the mind of man and direct it to this new way of thinking. The old way of thinking has landed us in this disastrous situation, even though, as I said, the world has made tremendous progress in many ways, progress which manifestly can cure the material ills of the world. But what shall it profit the world if it conquers the material ills and then commits suicide because it has not controlled its own mind! (Anthology 441)

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