



THE ROLE OF NON-VIOLENCE IN BUILDING A SARVODAYA SOCIETY: A GANDHIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Sarvodaya promotes the ultimate goal of self realization through the principles of truth and non-violence. It advocates for social justice and equality and the importance of collective well being for a truly egalitarian society. Sarvodaya aims at bringing integration with the all-comprehensive vision to focus and ensure the good of all. One of the greatest personalities of history, Gandhi proved himself a man of love and sacrifice . He envisaged a world wherein a new social order will be established. An ardent follower of truth and non-violence he talked of perennial human values and practiced his ideas for rebuilding a human society. Gandhi believed that non-violence is a means to reach the goal. The present paper aims to explore Gandhi's concept of Sarvodaya and the role of non-violence for a holistic development and decentralized, self-reliant society.

Keywords: Non-violence, Roots, Sarvodaya society, Gandhian perspective

INTRODUCTION

Sarvodaya stands for the progress of all and creates a responsible society with the ideal of goodness of man and with services of humanity. Sarvodaya aims at the realization of global welfare. A Sanskrit term 'Sarvodaya' combines 'Sarva' (meaning all) and 'Udaya' (meaning uplift, rise, prosperity) to transform society for the well being of all. Sarvodaya promotes the ultimate goal of self realization through the principles of truth and non-violence. It advocates for social justice and equality and the importance of collective well being for a truly egalitarian society. Sarvodaya was first articulated by Gandhi while translating John Ruskin's 'Unto This

Last' into Gujarati . Gandhi gave prominence to the term Sarvodaya and highlighted the central teachings of Ruskin's book concerning on the

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development and upliftment of every individual in the society. Sarvodaya undertakes the greatest good of all based on spiritual and moral values to ensure a new society. The main principle of Sarvodaya is the overall development of the individual in all spheres of life. Sarvodaya aims at bringing integration with the all-comprehensive vision to focus and ensure the good of all. Sarvodaya stands for the rights and duties of every individual where privileges have been given to social justice for all. The present paper aims to explore Gandhi's concept of Sarvodaya and the role of non-violence for a holistic development and decentralized, self-reliant society.

OBJECTIVES

The study is undertaken to have an in depth analysis of non-violence and Gandhi's vision to build a Sarvodaya society.

METHODOLOGY

To achieve the specific target , the descriptive method has been used in this study. The study has been conducted on the basis of some secondary data and information which were collected from different books, research journals and websites.

NON-VIOLENCE : ITS ROOTS

'Ahimsa' the Sanskrit word of non-violence has a universal origin. It has developed through ages to teach that all human beings are equal. Throughout history non-violence have become a powerful means of challenging injustices. India is a land of religions and all religions emphasize the common principles of peace, unity, non-violence and truth. Mahatma Gandhi stated that "Everyone being the sharer of the Divine power is equal to the other and has the responsibility of preserving the life and dignity of the other."¹

According to Hinduism, each individual has to be conscious of ultimate dharma i.e. non-violence and the acceptance of eternal truth. Ahimsa prevents the wrong doings treated to others. Hindus believe that all forms of life are sacred and there are divine spirit within. Ahimsa is an Indian way of life and karma is the destiny to reunite with the divine.

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The earliest scriptures of the Hindus, the four Vedas became a source of knowledge and rooted in the principle of Ahimsa . Highly philosophical in approach Upanishads establishes oneness of all beings. Upanishads emphasizes the virtue of Ahimsa in the life of the people . Upanishad Brhadaranyaka stated that 'as man lives so he becomes . He who has done good is born again as a being having good tendencies and he who done evil as a being with evil tendencies – according to the performance of his action is his destiny.' (Stutley Margaret, 1989, p.29)

The concept of ahimsa finds its fullest expression in the glorious deeds of Lord Rama who believed in the glorification of peace, dharma and brotherhood. Ramayana preaches to follow the path of non-violence and highlights almost all the aspects of life. According to Mahabharata, "Ahimsa is the highest religion ; Ahimsa is the highest discipline; Ahimsa is the

highest penance; Ahimsa is the highest sacrifice; Ahimsa is the highest truth; gift, ritual ablution, holy merit, nothing is greater than Ahimsa.” Sage Vyasa’s world classic Mahabharata revealed ahimsa, the highest virtue of leading a life and working for self-realization. Bhishma’s words to Yudhishthira show the glorification of non-violence and the survival of doing good work.

A scripture on spirituality Bhagavad Gita encourages to establish peace and harmony among individuals and promotes deeper understanding on cultivating the virtues to serve the nature of work. Lord Krishna says “Ahimsa is the ultimate dharma.” Gita’s message on Ahimsa upholds re-establish righteousness and makes oneself realize his own reality within himself to lead a journey for perfection. Gita manifests oneness with God and teaches the whole humanity to attain pure consciousness to understand the reality within.

Medieval period witnessed several changes for social reconstruction on the basis of Ahimsa. A land of different religions and beliefs Indian people were made to practice Ahimsa to maintain peace in life. Gautam Buddha founded Buddhism, a religion of peace and non-violence to lead a life of inner peace. According to Buddhism, life is sacred and Ahimsa is pure which encourages universal brotherhood. Buddha believed in building a good society with equal justice and equal status to all individual on the basis of peace and

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non-violence. A true follower of Ahimsa, Buddha says in Dhammapada, “That one I call a Brahmin who has put aside weapons and renounced violence towards all creatures. Such one neither kills nor helps others to kill that one I call a Brahmin who is never hostile to those who are hostile toward him, who is attached among those who are selfish and at peace among those at war.” His doctrine of Ahimsa emphasized on the importance of love to make humanity closer to each other.

A spiritual ideal Ahimsa teaches equal treatment, respect and empathy to others. Lord Mahavira was the pioneer of Jainism and advocated the principle of ‘Punya’. Jainism talked about the role of action to bring peace of mind. In Jain doctrine the principle of Ahimsa influences practices to eliminate violence altogether. Jainism also talked self realization by doing goodness to others. Uttaradhyayana Sutra stated that “the essence of wisdom of a wise man lies in this that he hurts no creature; to be equal minded to all creatures and regard them as one’s own self is Ahimsa. Learn this Noble truth.” The five rules of Jains named as ‘Samitis’ observe ahimsa against evils for equal justifications of all creatures.

The teachings of Islam is based on the Holy Quran which prefers non-violence a better technique of conquering evil. Quran gave importance to patience and tolerance and regarded ahimsa a complete way of living. Quran preached, “Try to make people happy and go in terms of rising above self i.e. forget self and try to make life a thing of beauty, self offering, giving, bringing peace to people, then to set into motion a mysterious great law of the universe: thereby the universal consciousness provide all the needs of the soul, self and the society as a whole.” Prophet Mohammad, the messenger of Islam preached non-violence and truth in his teachings. He taught masses to respect each other and enlighten humanity for spreading the message of oneness with God.

Jesus Christ, the prophet of Christianity taught the message of ahimsa, love and sympathy . He was against violence and emphasized strongly to forgive others as ahimsa was core to his life. He believed that by helping others one can help himself and get real happiness. His last words, “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (Luke

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XXII, 37-40) . His teachings are mainly based on the power of the almighty and his blessings are great example of sacrifice and a service to humanity.

The concept of ahimsa has emerged broader perspective and made a great impact on the livelihood of the people.

NON-VIOLENCE : GANDHI'S VISION

One of the greatest personalities of history, Gandhi proved himself a man of love and sacrifice . He envisaged a world wherein a new social order will be established. An ardent follower of truth and non-violence he talked of perennial human values and practiced his ideas for rebuilding a human society. He accepted ethics as the fundamental principle of human life. He was always in view of self-reliance for self rule. He stressed on moral transformation of human being and also the spiritual value of universal brotherhood. Gandhi believed in the selfless service to God and the ways to self-realization. As he experienced hardships , sacrifices and living conditions of people he was deeply troubled to see the practice of untouchability and the profound beliefs to exploit the underprivileged . He believed that eliminating poverty among the masses would change the living structure and embraces moral awareness for civilisational process of humanism. Gandhi believed that God is within and non-violence is the highest moral virtue that requires an inner power to manifest his own self which establishes a communion with the divine. Gandhi advocates the principles of Karma. “I do not want to leave a thought or a school of philosophy under my name. Whatever I maintain today I may revise or change tomorrow. I have nothing new to teach. Truth and non-violence are as ancient as hillocks and mountains.” Gandhi’s non-violence implies a living force of power and a strength against all adversaries . According to him, non-violence is a way of life and it is a natural state of being. Without non-violence discovering truth is impossible. Non-violence involves selfless giving without seeking anything in return. Gandhi believed that purification of the mind is essential for practicing non-violence . He opined Ahimsa as a manifestation of the eternal moral law inherent in human existence. He acknowledged that non-violence is infinite love and a tireless activity which requires persistent and deliberate effort . Gandhi

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believed that “Non-violence is an active moral fight against wickedness.” In Gandhian philosophy truth and non-violence are deeply interconnected. Gandhi viewed life as an experiment of truth and his pursuit of truth became the fundamental aspect in his philosophy of non-violence . Gandhi once said, ‘not a power nor by might but by spirit to overcome all the problems and that spirit is non-violence.’ Gandhi advocated on the existence of an atmosphere where society will function on the basis of non-violence. He envisioned a society with a new form of development for the entire community. In Gandhian concept of Sarvodaya the good of

individual is the good of all which leads to the good of the society. He emphasized the importance of collective well being to eliminate disparity and create a truly egalitarian society. Gandhi said, 'Identification with everything that lives is impossible without self purification; without self purification the observance of the law of Ahimsa must remain an empty dream; God can never be realized by one who is not pure of heart. Self purification therefore must mean purification in all the walks of life and purification being highly infections, purification of oneself necessarily leads to the purification of one's surroundings. Gandhi believed that non-violence is a means to reach the goal.

NON-VIOLENCE AND TRUTH : AN INTERCONNECTED WHOLE

As a seeker for truth Gandhi spent his whole life in pursuit of this goal. He spoke on truth and made people realize the guiding principles of truth. Gandhi opines 'the more I search after truth the more I feel it is all-inclusive. Truth is not covered by non-violence. But I often experience that non-violence is included in truth. What a pure heart feels at a particular time is truth : by remaining firm on that , undiluted truth can be attained.' Gandhi's autobiography 'The Story of My Experiments with Truth' reveals his passionate advocacy for truth and a complete assertion of the statement 'Truth is God'. His vision was to see truth not only a moral ideal but a tool for social transformation . His idea of accepting truth for values is a path against injustices faced by individuals. He admitted that God is itself truth and affirmed the essence of truth with the essence of God.

Gandhi believed on moral purity in all aspects of life and a path to self-realization and liberation. The pursuit of truth as Gandhi acclaimed inherently non-violent and

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transformative. Gandhi stated that non-violence promotes understanding and respecting dignity of others. In Gandhian thought , truth, God and non-violence form a moral and spiritual foundation of existence confined to righteousness and self discipline. Gandhi believed that communion with God is a commitment to non-violence and truth. For Gandhi, truth was an active force for transparency and honesty in the journey of life. Gandhi believed that pursuit of truth was not only a personal but spiritual quest to integrate both inner peace and societal well being. Gandhi's vision of a egalitarian society values truth and his approach to social justice was non-violent. Gandhi wanted to establish a society free from violence and injustices. While adhering to non-violence and compassion Gandhi opined that every individual live truthfully. Gandhi often said, 'My religion is based on truth and non-violence.'

NON-VIOLENCE AND SATYAGRAHA : A COMMITMENT TO RESTORE UNITY

A firm believer of freedom and peace Gandhi built an environment with the spirit of truth and non-violence to strengthen local community. He said, 'Service of the poor has been my heart's desire and it has always thrown me amongst the poor and enabled me to identify myself with them.' He envisioned a non-violent social order and tried to aware people to uplift themselves from all their sufferings and injustices. Gandhi expected others to give free service and work for the community. His approach is one of emancipation and all round development to reach out to the individual. Gandhi started Satyagraha with the idea of non-violent resistance. He

opined that satyagraha is to be accompanied by ahimsa or non-violence. Satyagraha is a search for truth and Gandhi's spirit of dedication and sacrifice. Gandhi believed that satyagraha is the powerful weapon to resist evil and unjust.

A satyagrahi is actively non-violent and believes in the goodness of human nature. For Gandhi, satyagraha is a peaceful protest against all untruth, suffering and wrong doing. According to Gandhi, a satyagrahi tries to eradicate evil and cooperates with his actions a sense of swadeshi spirit amongst the masses. The Satyagraha derives its fundamental ideal from truth. It represents a method aimed at establishing justice through the power of love or ahimsa. It is built on the principle to achieve justice. Gandhi asserted that Satyagraha

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demands absolute non-violence, the importance of civility to achieve the goal. Gandhi wrote, "If the truth force is accompanied with non-violence, one can subdue the universe. This is the essence of Satyagraha. We are here to allow truth and love in the humdrum of national and political life." Gandhi believed that the non-violence of Satyagrahi would establish a change in the minds of the masses and encourage them to actively participate in the movement. Gandhi's concept of social change was universal and satyagraha was a means to strengthen people to achieve the desired goal. Sarvodaya focuses on the welfare of all and Satyagraha manifests through peaceful and compassionate vision to achieve it.

SARVODAYA THROUGH THE LENS OF NON-VIOLENCE

Gandhi in Harijan (1946) said, "If mankind was to progress and to realize the ideals of equality and brotherhood, it must adopt and act on the principle of Unto This Last, a book written with blood and tears." Gandhi envisioned a Ramrajya, a holistic development for all. He preached economic equality to overcome longstanding disparities and fosters economic growth and self-sufficiency at the local level particularly the deprived and the marginalized classes. Gandhi believed that non-violence could solve problems and serve a path to attain the truth. He envisioned a non-violent stateless society where everyone is free and equal socially, economically and politically. Gandhi called his ideal state an ideally non-violent state where every individual can lead a complete personal swaraj. He believed that every individual becomes the ruler of his own power. Gandhi urged people to think positively and consider it necessary for moral development. He valued individual freedom and voluntary cooperation for the sake of society. Gandhi was highly concerned with strengthening man's individuality and building a stateless society where people would be free from all bondages. He believed that there would be no distinctions of class, caste or communal authority. Gandhi believed in an integral and composite life.

Gandhi's political vision was rooted in swaraj, ahimsa and satya. Gandhi believed that politics transformed the ground reality of existence – centred on power. He stated that

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democratic politics based on centralized state authority are not instrumental for public welfare. Gandhi believed in community participation and moral activity for the welfare of all. Gandhi opined that true democracy is guided by truth and non-violence and is a powerful government of

morally responsible citizens. Gandhi believed that local autonomy was essential for achieving true democracy. Gandhi envisaged to build a society along with the democratic ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity.

CONCLUSION

Gandhi's Sarvodaya challenges conventional political structures and emphasizes the needs of the marginalized for the welfare of the society. Gandhi cared for the weakest sections of the society so his focus was mainly on the upliftment of individual lives with dignity and rights. He believed in the supremacy of all and transformative power of love and non-violence. He viewed liberty as the freedom to express oneself and live in harmony with others. He urged for social justice and participation in a social order with a shared responsibility to ensure equality and rights.

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