

Politics of Non-Violence: Satyagraha Movement of Gandhi (1906-1948): A Critical Study

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Real swaraj (freedom) is self-rule or self-control. The way to it is Satyagraha: the power of truth and love... I have endeavoured to explain it as I understand it, and my conscience testifies that my life henceforth is dedicated to its attainment.

*M. K. Gandhi
Hind Swaraj, 1909.¹*

The dawn of twentieth century witnessed the moral decline of the international society. It was a time when violence and use of arms had spread across the globe. Men believed in the jungle law of 'might is right'. The struggle for domination through waging wars, maintaining colonies and establishing great empires were described as a structural necessity for an anarchic interstate system. The militant nationalist ideologies of Stalin and Hitler, justified their violence, under the Machiavellian doctrine of 'ends justify the

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1 M.K. Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatama Gandhi* (hereafter, *Collected Works*), Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1961, pp.10, 64; and *Hind Swarajya* (Ahmadabad: Navajivan, Prakashan Mandir Publishing House) 1979, pp.269-70. The latter is a photostatic copy of Gandhi's original handwritten text in Gujarati.

means.’ In this reign of terror and violence a man emerged with a different rather an opposite ideology. For him ‘truth is God and God is love,’ therefore, love your enemy.² He believed that not the force of arms but the strength of one’s ‘truthful soul’ should be placed against the will of the tyrant to ‘defy the whole might of an unjust empire’³ in order to preserve national pride. He invited the school of violence to give peace and love a chance with the staunch belief that it could only fail due to poverty of response.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi is not the name of a person but a movement, a philosophy, an ideology which stood for national honour and prestige of millions of Indians in the Subcontinent. The dynamism of the Gandhi-led movement can be viewed from the fact that within the span of a few decades he transformed the frail and scattered subjects of the British India into a grand national force that claimed and achieved freedom on the basis of their regenerated nationalism. The manifesto of Gandhi was novel for his age, in the sense that unlike the bloody revolution of Russia (1917), the leader of the Indian freedom movement came with a completely distinct theme and programme. The non-violence, truth of soul, suffering love, all are the different names of one national movement of non-violence, defined by Gandhi as *Satyagraha* in 1906.⁴

(1)

The leader of Indian nationalist movement and the founder of non-violence creed in India was born in October 1869 in the western city of Gujarat of British India. He learned the grammar of love and tolerance for others under the religious influence of his mother. He trained as a lawyer in England (1888-1891) and practised law in South Africa (1893-1914). By 1915-1916 he entered the Indian political arena through the platform of All India Congress. In his political career of almost four decades he led Indians on various occasions. His leadership of Khilafat Movement (1918-1922); the presidentship of All India Congress; the first

2 Raghavan Iyer (ed.), *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 2 vols., p.9.

3 Gandhi, ‘The Doctrine of Sword’, *Young India*, 1 August 1920.

4 *Encyclopedia of Britannica* (USA: the University of Chicago, 1985), pp.326-400.

Satyagraha against the racial discrimination of English Government of South Africa 1906; the historic Salt March (1930); the Quit India Movement 1942; and the historic Calcutta Fast (1946-47) are all marked by his unflinching faith and unshakable commitment to the non-violence as a mode to achieve *swaraj* (self rule) for India. During this period he observed painfully the general plight of his countrymen under the suzerainty of the English Imperialism. He was upset by the disintegration of Indian traditions and values at the hands of the British materialist civilization. At the same time he observed and even suffered human rights violation of the worst kind in the British India. The *Jallian Wallah Bagh* Tragedy, denial of the political and constitutional rights to the Indians and the refusal of the British government to provide the basic necessities of life (viz. taxation of salt) to the Indians illustrate the poor condition of human rights record of British colonialism in India. Gandhi emerged as a man of thought and action with the solution, rather a programme of reformation to stop the political and moral decline and exploitation of common Indians. He envisaged a unique method of ‘melting the stony heart’ of the opponents to uproot the evil. *Satyagraha* or non-violence was the technique, which he evolved for the revitalization of a deceased body politic of India.

(2)

What is *Satyagraha* when asked by the Hunter Commission, Gandhi replied “It is a movement intended to replace the methods of violence with non-violence.⁵ *Satyagraha* is a product of three elements, ‘truth’, ‘*ahimsa*’, (love for others) and ‘self-suffering’.⁶ All these forces tied together to make *Satyagraha*. One would briefly discuss all the three elements to explain the actual spirit and the nature of *Satyagraha* movement. First of all, Gandhi propagates the Theory of Relative Truth as the logical foundation of *Satyagraha*. He refuses to accept that a man has a full knowledge of truth. He himself admits that “I am a seeker after

5 Joan V. Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965), hereafter Bondurant or *Conquest of Violence*, with numbers indicating chapters and pages.

6 Gandhi wrote in ‘The Doctrine of Sword’, *Young India*, 11 August 1920.

truth...(after a lot of efforts) I have not yet found it.” Man cannot claim the knowledge of absolute truth, therefore, in the case of conflicts he should never resort to violence. He should rather be tolerant enough to acknowledge his opponent’s view with rationality, and if he finds himself wrong he must admit and make amendments.⁷ For Gandhi use of violence in its worse state could he justified only and until one is filly confident that he is ‘completely right and his opponent is completely wrong.’ In the absence of absolute truth it is illogical and dreadful to use violence and damage others as the ‘injury’ once inflicted cannot be rebridged.⁸ Gandhi seemed to institutionalize the force of truth in the society to eradicate the phenomenon of conflicts that lead to violence.⁹ But how to institutionalize the truth? Through ‘*ahimsa*’ Gandhi replies. *Ahimsa* is an ancient Hindu word which means “action based on refusal to do harm” or in other words, it is love for everyone and hatred for none.¹⁰ For Gandhi the power of love and truth, makes strong combination to solve the conflicts and violence. It works ‘silently and changes the heart’ of the worst adversary. While defining his philosophy of love and non-violence he gives the theory of “good ends and good means” in complete contrast to Machiavellian logic of “ends justify the means.” For Gandhi violence cannot be justified for the achievement of ‘means’ no matter how moral and noble the ‘ends’ may be.¹¹ *Ahimsa* is the means and truth is the end. Once a man realizes the strength of both ‘the end...the final victory is beyond question.’¹² The ‘self-suffering’ is the third element of *Satyagraha* that testifies the sincerity end truth of one’s determination and commitment to non-violence. Just as one must learn the art of killing in the training for violence, so one must learn the art of dying in the training for non-violence.”¹³

7 *Ibid.*

8 Raghavan Iyer (ed.), *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol.1, pp.30-31.

9 *Ibid.*

10 *Ibid.*, pp.99-100.

11 Gandhi wrote in *Young India*, July 17, 1924.

12 *Gandhi from Yeravda Mandir: Ashram observances translated from the original Gujarati by Valji Govidji Desai* (Ahmadabad: Navajivan, 1945), p.8.

13 *The Collected Works, Young India*, 11 August 1920.

‘Self suffering’ in *Satyagraha* is an act of fearlessness and courage to reject the unjust without resorting to violence. It is an expression of one’s ‘indomitable will to defy the whole might of an unjust empire.’¹⁴ Gandhi brought *swaraj* at the heart of India’s independence from British rule. In a plain sense *swaraj* means self-rule, but for Gandhi, *swaraj* was a broader concept i.e., besides the political goals, the word in itself had spiritual implications too. It meant an overall freedom—free from stagnancy of knowledge, free from ignorance, free from materialism, free from violence — as Gandhi believed that independence may mean licence to do as you like. *Swaraj* is positive. Independence is negative. The word *swaraj* is a word, meaning self-rule and self-restraint, and not freedom from all restraint which independence often means. To sum up, *Satyagraha* is compound of three forces — the truth, *ahimsa* and self-suffering. It was the method Gandhi formulated and successfully implemented to achieve independence for India. It includes various techniques and methods such as civil disobedience, i.e., decline to pay taxes or to deny the official authority of an unjust government; non-cooperation in the form of economic and political boycotts; resignations from official posts. It also involves self-suffering in the form of ‘fasting’¹⁵ and volunteer imprisonment. All these methods, Gandhi considered, would touch the conscience of the enemy, ‘change his heart’ and the conflict would cease to exist.

(3)

Why did Gandhi choose *Satyagraha* or non-violent means to attain independence? There are three factors that inspired him to adopt non-violent warfare against British imperialism. Since his childhood he was trained as a moral soul under the religious and non-violent teachings of Hinduism and Jainism. Therefore, he “took for granted” the practice of *ahimsa*, tolerance towards various creeds.¹⁶ Then in his youth, he learned in his own words how to carry the orders of elders and not to scan them.¹⁷ It is

14 *Ibid.*

15 *Ibid.*, September 29, 1921.

16 *Encyclopedia of Britannica*, 1985, p.356.

17 *Ibid.*

difficult for a person possessing such a moral and passive tendencies to wage wars in his life. Secondly, during his stay in England he came across the teachings of Islam and Christianity. They exposed to him the power of tolerance and love in the administration of human affairs.¹⁸ Last but not the least, as Gene Sharp observes in his book *Gandhi as a Political Strategist*, Gandhi was well aware of the success of other non-violent movements, such as the non-violent movements in China, Russia and among the Blacks in South Africa, before he selected *Satyagraha* for Indians. The most inspiring example, however, came from the American War of Independence. In the struggle against the British rule the Colonists, like Gandhi, protested the Stamp Act, duty on tea, the Townsend Acts all in the non-violent way.¹⁹ Once convinced by the success of Americans, Gandhi designed his civil disobediences or *Satyagraha* to paralyze the government with the overwhelming moral force of non-violence.

(4)

***Satyagraha* Movement: A Critical Appreciation**

Why did Indians follow Gandhi? What made people defy colonial Government of India on the call of Gandhi? How did Indians revive their national pride and honour under the Gandhiled *Satyagraha*? The following section of the essay deals with the strengths of Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence keeping in mind the above three questions.

The overwhelming support and success Gandhi achieved was due to his unique *Satyagraha* movement. It was the versatile blend of the ancient Indian traditions and the western principles of rationality and humanism that his contemporaries like Tagore and predecessor like Tilak lacked. Although the latter had philosophies and theories of power, freedom, and change yet they all fell short of a comprehensive and practical methodology to revive the national honour and pride of India. Gandhi had both. The *Satyagraha* revolution, then could not be blocked by any form of

18 D. Dolton, *Mahatma Gandhi, Nonviolent Power in Action* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), henceforth referred to as Dolton, *Nonviolent Power*.

19 Mark Shepard, *Mahatma Gandhi and his Myths* (Los Angeles: Shepard, 2002), p.19.

imperialism until it had achieved the complete independence for India.

First of all, Gandhi with the moral support (of traditional concepts of) *ahimsa* challenged the British imperialism on the one hand and Hindu orthodoxy on the other. The people of India listened to him because he was talking to them in the language and manner they understood fully. The masses mobilized on his call because they believed in the 'inner spirit' of Mahatma that could never desert them.²⁰ Gandh's greatest contribution was the bringing of people from various classes, creeds and religions into one community of Indian family. In Gandhi-led *Satyagraha* we find the peasants and landlords, the capitalists and the workers, the intellectual and illiterates, the westernized scholars and the traditional elites, the Hindus and the Muslims, the high caste Hindus and Untouchables, all working for each other's interests. By joining all the Indians in a common bond of citizenship he made them realize the value of their national identity. He infused in them a national spirit to fight unitedly against the inequalities. Having convinced them that they were nothing but Indians and that their grievances and enemy was the same, it was easy for him to direct the entire strength of a united nation against Great Britain to achieve national independence.²¹

Secondly, Gandhi was well aware of the fact that Indians were not merely suppressed politically but their culture, their ethics, their moral and religious traits, in short the whole Indian civilization had been repressed by the modern materialist

20 For Robert Payne, the biographer of Gandhi, the moral and political authority of Gandhi over Hindus was as absolute as if he declared that henceforth all the Indians should march towards the Himalayas, millions of Indians would follow his command. See Robert Payne, *The life and Death of Mahatma Gandhi* (New York: Macmillan), pp.346-47.

21 Freedom for Gandhi was neither a condition granted by some social contract nor a gratuitous privilege; freedom was rather rooted in the moral freedom of the individual and was thus inalienable. Furthermore, as observed by Iyer, Gandhi 'saw freedom as a social necessity which can't be severed from its roots in the individual psyche; only society based on some minimal degree of awakened conscious can sustain itself for long. Freedom as an inherent characteristic of human nature is true *swaraj* or self-rule. *Swaraj* in its fullest sense is perfect freedom from all bondage and it could be equated with *moksha* or liberation.' Raghavan Iyer (ed.), 2 vols. *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp.8-9.

civilization.²² For the resurrection of national culture and heritage he had conducted a spiritual surgery of the body politic of India. Gandhi with his unique method of Civil Disobedience and Non-cooperation exposed to the masses a simple and national style of leadership. He did not play with words but his clothing, language, way of living, his thoughts all were deeply rooted in Indian culture and values. In order to impel his authority over the masses he toured their houses and villages. He listened to their problems; provided them the suggestions; redressed their sufferings and became their Mahatma. Wherever he went his Indian style of leadership stood in distinct contrast to that of the West and its culture. He loved his people; cared for them and in return they rejected British clothes and accepted *khadi*. Indians followed Mahatma and started speaking national languages with great pride. Gandhi by dint of his moral charisma successfully inspired the whole generation of British India, and attained for himself the status of an ancient and proud spirit of the Subcontinent.²³ Had Gandhi not used the platform of *Satyagraha* movement, to explore the true national culture of India, he might have not been able to restore the national pride of the Indians. And once people of India revitalized their self-respect, the emancipation from any sort of exploitation and imperialism was inevitable.

Thirdly, the most pivotal service *Satyagraha* rendered for the independence of India was the complete eradication of the official terror of the British government. Gandhi openly described *Satyagraha* as the movement of brave and courageous people who knew how to die for a cause. His whole philosophy of non-violence appealed to his people to show their unassailable will, to place their 'complete soul against the tyranny of unjust empire'.²⁴ When Indians fearlessly organized large-scale *Satyagraha* protests, refused to pay salt taxes, gave up their official jobs and titles, the

22 For Gandhi's criticism of the modern civilization, see *Hind Swaraj* (Ahmadabad: Navajiran, 1938), and also *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatama Gandhi*, Vol.1, Part 4.

23 For the Hindus, 'when Mahatma speaks, as noted by the President of the Congress *Subhas Bose* 'it does so in the language... of the *Bhagvant Gita* and the *Ramayana*... he reminds them of the glorious Ramrajya... and they accepted him.' S. Bose, *The Indian Struggle 1920-1942* (Bombay: 1964) p.293.

24 *The Collected Works, Young India*, August 11, 1920.

authority of the mighty British Empire was challenged.²⁵ It erased once and for all the fear of English imperialism from the minds of Indians. It had raised the commoners above the fear of the British Police and British Army, harsh secret service and impersonal bureaucracy, fear of prison and harsh laws, fear of feudal lords and fear of poverty. Gandhi with his four decades of national leadership transformed the tenuous and afraid, disunited and wretched Indians into the bold and courageous nation of freedom fighters. The Indians now fully realized their moral and physical might. The impact of *Satyagraha* was enormously psychological as it snatched the *swaraj* from the teeth of the British. Nehru explains this revolutionary change among the Indian in such words:

And then Gandhi came. He was like a powerful current of fresh air. He seemed to emerge from the millions of India, speaking their language... political freedom took new shape... Fearlessness not merely bodily courage but the absence of fear from the mind...The dominant impulse in India under British rule was that of fear, pervasive, oppressing, strangling fear, fear of the army, the police.... It was against the pervading fear that Gandhi's voice raised; be not afraid... So suddenly that black wall of fear was lifted from the people's shoulders.²⁶

And this made them bold enough to demand their political rights. The chivalry the Indians had developed during the *Satyagraha* experience eventually led to the independence of India.

Fourthly, if on the one hand Gandhi's strategy of non-violence empowered the Indians, on the other hand, it completely outwitted the colonial authority of Great Britain. It off-guarded them completely as the British imperialism had probably faced for the first time, since the American war of independence, a non-violence resistance. It had always put them on the horns of dilemma. Gandhi played with their nerves. He put the British government in such a perplexed situation from where they could neither retreat

25 The Indian Muslims started an anti-British Khilafat Movement in 1919 under the leadership of Gandhi and Ali Brothers to save the Holy Office of Turkish caliph. Gandhi believed at the advent of the Civil Disobedience Movement (1929-31) that 'such an opportunity to unite the two would not come in thousand years', Gandhi quoted in *Collected Works, Young India*, September, 1920. Also see the enormous impact of Gandhi headed Civil Disobedience Movement on Hindus and Muslims in the following text — Abdul Hamid, *Muslim Separatism in India* (Oxford University Press, 1967), p.147.

26 Jawaharlal Nehru, *Discovery of India* (New York: Doubleday Press, 1959), p.131.

nor move ahead. If *Satyagraha* would have been merely the violent protest it would have been very easy for the government to answer them by describing the protesters as terrorists. But because *Satyagraha* appealed to the human conscience, therefore, it made difficult for the government to treat them inhumanly. That was probably the reason that a white sergeant, in the Salt *Satyagraha* of 1930, withdrew his arms with shock and horror, instead of hitting the Sikh protester, saying 'it is no use, you can't hit a bugger when he stands upto you like that.' He gave the Sikh a mock salute and walked off.²⁷ In North-West Frontier Province some troops of army preferred to be court-martialed rather than kill the unarmed protesters of non-violence.²⁸ The above instances of *Satyagraha* touched the moral instincts of the opponents and changed their heart. Moreover, whenever Gandhi staged *Satyagraha*, the government had to face immense pressure from the media; the national and international press always took great interest in such a unique non-violent protest for self-rule. Even the politicians of the British Parliament hailed Gandhi as a person 'who in living out his creed, personally... succeeded in doing so more completely than anyone...since Christ.'²⁹ The consequence of non-violent movement was dynamic. Due to the pressure from all sides, government always delayed arresting the leadership in civil disobedience movements. For example, it took them two months after the inception of Salt *Satyagraha* to imprison Gandhi. This mid-period was always crucial for Gandhi and other leaders, in generating national and international support for the negation of harsh laws. It undermined the entire political structure of power. As acknowledged by Lord Birkenhead the Gandhi led-movement of non-cooperation used to fluster the entire machinery of British Government in India. At the advent of 1930 the prestige of British rule had shrunk so low that any individual or body could dare to

27 Negley Farson in Eugene Lyons, *We Cover the World* (New York: 1937), p.141.

28 Dolton, pp.121-22.

29 Fenner Brockway, in Preface to *Mahatma Gandhi, His Mission and Message* (London: G.S. Darra, 129), p.6. Also see in New York, the *Literary Digest* in an editorial on the salt march titled "A Saint in Politics", wrote that Gandhi "is marching to the sea to further his campaign. The Sermon on the Mount is his book of etiquette."

deliver any British Governor an ultimatum.³⁰ Gandhi's *Satyagraha* played with the psyche of the government, shook its very foundations, made it ambivalent and paralyzed the official machinery. The non-violent civil disobedience movements always aimed at pushing the government into a dilemma that 'damned if you do, damned if you don't fix...' It used to exhaust the entire colonial structure and bring the government to a standstill. The movement could have never gained such a huge momentum of success, had it contained the element of violence and aggression.

Fifthly, *Satyagraha* broke the spell of orthodoxy that had been the stumbling block to the cultural social and political progress of India. The Indian society before Gandhi had never benefited from the skills and services of women. The reason was Hindu orthodox society that considered women inferior to men.³¹ Gandhi's *Satyagraha* movement brought thousands of women into action. It opened the door for the females to show their talent and contribute to the national progress of India. As observed by Madhu Kishwer in *Gandhi on Women*, the participation of higher and lower classes of women in the *Satyagraha* showed the non-violence of the protest. It also showed the splits in the orthodoxy and the rise of the social justice on the Indian soil.³² Ashoka's India might have never witnessed the iron lady like Indira Gandhi had Gandhi not made the women an equal partner in the Indian nationalist movement. Secondly, in the quest to unite India, Gandhi rather completely trespassed the orthodoxy by putting efforts to abolish the socio-political evil of untouchability of Hindu-Muslim antagonism. These two problems were a severe threat to the unity and power of India. Therefore, he included both the issues on the national agenda of *Satyagraha* movement. But arguably Gandhi

30 Dolton, *Non-Violent Power*, p.146.

31 Following accounts are useful for the study of the Indian caste system — Ram Manohar Lohia, *The Guilty Men of India's Partition*, p.36; Sir Percival Griffith, *Modern India* (London: 1967), Ian Stephens, *Pakistan*, (London: Ernest Benn, 1963), B.R. Ambedkar, *What Gandhi and Congress have done to the Untouchables* (India: 1970).

32 For Gloria Steinem Gandhi's entire life explains that his personal journey offers parallels with women's struggle for freedom and self-esteem when faced with sexual oppression. Gloria Steinem, *Revolution from Within* (Boston: Little Brown, 1992), pp.49-53. Also see on the same topic — Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp.103-05, 155.

almost failed in these tasks, particularly in the latter. This research discusses both the issues under the section titled “Limits and Failures of *Satyagraha*”.

Sixthly, Gandhi’s *Satyagraha* invoked the new political culture in India, purely nationalist in nature. The Congress prior to Gandhi was the party of elite classes that functioned with the blessings of the British government. Its goal had never been a full-fledged freedom, but merely a liberal democratic polity within the British Raj. Its methods were shortsighted and limited to constitutional, liberal and moderate politics.³³ Gandhi through the platform of *Satyagraha* transformed this flimsy and impotent voice of few classes to the powerful national organization of the kind India had never known. Gandhi-sponsored *Satyagraha* provided ample opportunities to people from various classes, creeds and sections of Indian society to get together and share their problems. From poor to rich, Muslims to Sikhs, atheists to orthodox and liberals to communists, all became part of this national forum. People from different groups got together, discussed and shared their problems, disagreed with each other but respected the

33 The All-Indian National Congress (A.I.N.C.), founded in 1885, was the product of the modern thinking. Its first breed included, moderate and westernized nationalists like Gopal Krishna Ghokle, Dadabhai Naoroji and last but not the least, Mohammad Ali Jinnah — all sharing the same vision that India should acquire independence through constitutional means rather than mob violence and politics of agitation. The propagators of Indian Renaissance were the moderate Indian elite who were trained and educated under the British system. As early as 1820s these moderates predicted that Britain’s commitment to the principles of democracy and the growth of the political system in India would eventually lead to political independence and, therefore, the Indians must equip themselves with modern education, scientific knowledge and civil norms so that they would justify their ability to handle or lead western-based representative democracy. They were moderates because for the attainment of liberation they rejected the violent means or mob mobilization and chose the course of peaceful constitutional British tradition for the attainment of colonial self-rule on the same footing as acquired by the colonial self-governments of Canada and Australia. They were liberals because they shared the British liberal traditions i.e., their political norms, legal institutions and the responsible but realist approach to address the issues ranging from politics to economics, social stagnation to religious antagonism and so on. They were constitutionalists, because they believed in the fairness and justice of the British and agreed that the Indian independence would achieve through the gradual spread of constitutional reforms leading towards the self-government, and eventually the independence, which the Parliament of Her Excellency had promised with the Indian people.

opponent's point of view. The members of this new Indian culture, instead of speaking different languages ended a national consensus that paved the way for the formation of national political language.³⁴ This national culture has arguably immense impact on the rise and success of India as a secular country. India is composed of homogenous identities, multicultural and various linguistic and religious sects. She could probably avoid the risks of a civil war and religious riots with the introduction of secularism. Indian secularism grew in the national climate of *Satyagraha*. *Satyagraha* movement invoked the sense of a national family among the Indian. The members of this Indian family might have differences of opinion but the clash could never extend at the cost of country's national interests. This factor alone helped in institutionalizing tolerance among the various Indian factions to strengthen the unity of the country. Even when partition became inevitable Gandhi tried his best to keep majority of Muslims in India so that the country could retain her homogeneity and secular character.³⁵ Indians realized their decay only about 1920 and that was the time when Gandhi launched his non-violent movement of reform. It infused a new political culture; installed a new political programme; introduced a new phase into their national and individual problems and became the prophet of their regenerated nationhood.

Gandhi and his philosophy of non-violence contributed enormously in transforming the politically disunited and morally declined people of India into an all-powerful national force. It achieved *swaraj* without resorting to arms and violence. But for a balanced assessment one needs to explore the other side of the debate; Gandhi's logic of non-violence and methodology of *Satyagraha* suffers from serious limitations.

34 To explore Gandhi's views on the significance and revitalization of national political culture, see Gandhi quoted in *Young India*, 22 June, 1921, 3 April 1924, 7 October 1926 and 5 February 1925. To evaluate Gandhi's impact on Indian nationalist politics following texts are significant. Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy*, pp.217-33; Boundurant, *Conquest of Violence*, pp.110-16; J.M. Brown, *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience* (Cambridge University Press, 1977).

35 *Gandhi's Political Philosophy*, pp.216-17.

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Limits and Failure of *Satyagraha* Movement

Gandhi throughout his *Satyagraha* movement for independence held the strong desire of a united India. Hindu-Muslim unity was one of the three ultimate goals of *Satyagraha* movement. Gandhi's enthusiastic participation in the Khilafat Movement indicates his desire to struggle for the independence with the mutual collaboration of Hindus and Muslims. But what went wrong and why the British left India as two independent states? Is it not the defeat of Gandhi's philosophy of 'Change of Heart' that failed to change the hearts of Muslim leaders ranging from Shaukat Ali, Iqbal to Muhammad Ali Jinnah? Gandhi included the Muslims in All India Congress and made them the part of his non-violent civil disobedience movement in order to strengthen his argument against the government. But for the politically literate Muslims the language, the style, the structure and practices of *Satyagraha* were extremely Hindu dominated.³⁶ Gandhi claimed himself to be a liberal reformer. And it can be argued that had he adopted the path of liberalism and realism in the homogenous society like India the history of India would have been different. But his liberal zeal was overshadowed by his religious-oriented political manoeuvres and

36 The Muslim apprehensions regarding Gandhi's Brahmanization could be seen in the separatist tones of Punjabi Muslim nationalist politician M. Iqbal, (later became the national poet of Pakistan) who used to be the staunch Indian nationalist; the author of Indian national anthem, but as a reaction to Gandhi's politics became the first President of Muslim League who in 1930 presented the idea of separate Muslim states where the Muslim interests would be saved from a Gandhi headed Brahman India — "I would like to see the Punjab, North Western Frontier Province, Sindh and Baluchistan amalgamated into a single state Self-government within the British empire or without the British empire, the formation of consolidated North West India appears to me to be the final destiny of the Muslims, at least of North West India." See the whole text in *Foundations of Pakistan: Official Documents of All India Muslim League* (Karachi: National Publishing House, 1970) Vol. 2 (1924-1947). Also see Iqbal letters to Jinnah in late 1930s in which he stressed the latter that "alternative to a free Muslim state or states would be a civil war." He condemned Gandhi's universalization of Hinduism and asked Jinnah that "a separate Indian federation of Muslim provinces... is the only course by which we can secure a peaceful India and save Muslims from the domination of Hindus." See Iqbal's letter dated June 21, 1937 to Jinnah cited in *Pakistani Movement: Historic Documents* (Karachi: P.S. Agency, 1967), pp.130-31.

frequent use of Hindu phrases on almost every occasion.³⁷ It was an irony that a Western educated person like Gandhi who called himself 'reformer through and through' contradicted his modernism with his permanent insistence upon the values of orthodox Hinduism. Gandhi who was to be the leader of both the Hindus and Muslim, became communal when in an unambiguous language he exposed himself as a "Sanatanist" (orthodox) Hindu and hence created misunderstandings and suspicions among the Muslim ranks.³⁸ His repeated insistence on the greatness of the class or caste-divided society, his high regard for 'idol worship' and 'cow protection' and blind faith in the Hindu laws of the 'Vedas, Upanishads', 're-incarnation', 'Hindu scriptures'³⁹ only painted him as a orthodox Hindu. Even the political weapons he employed, and the political language he adopted in his battle against the British and other opponents were characteristically Hindu.⁴⁰ The Hindus found sheer satisfaction in Gandhi-generated Hindu symbols and his open loyalty to the Vedic Laws. The majority of the Hindu Congressmen too came under Gandhi's spell because they rightly or wrongly believed that "he" could alone revive the Hindu civilization, its values and traditions.⁴¹ His

37 "For me there are not politics but religion. They subserve religion. The politician in me has never dominated a single decision of mine, and if I take part in politics, it is only because politics encircle us today like the coil of a snake, from which one cannot go out, no matter how much one tries. In order to wrestle with the snake, I have been experimenting with myself and my friends in politics in politics by introducing religion into politics." Gandhi, *Young India*, 12 May 1920, published in Ahmadabad weekly.

38 One of the prominent Muslim leaders Mohammed Ali conceived Gandhi's religious-political strategy as 'Mr. Gandhi is fighting for the supremacy of Hinduism and the submergence of Muslims,' cited in Khalid bin Sayeed, 1960, p.60.

39 "I call myself a Sanatanist (orthodox) Hindu because, firstly I believe in the Vedas... and all that goes by the name of Hindu scriptures. Secondly, I believe in the caste system, thirdly, I believe in the protection of cow as an article of faith, and fourthly, I do not disbelieve in idol worship," Gandhi quoted in *Young India*, 12 October 1921.

40 Gandhi openly declared, "I have therefore ventured to place before India the ancient law of self-sacrifice. For *Satyagraha* and its offshoots, non-cooperation and civil resistance is nothing but new names for the law of suffering. *The Rishis* were greater geniuses than Newton. They were themselves greater than Willington." Gandhi, *Collected Works, Young India*, 1920 (Madras: 1922), p.261.

41 For the Hindus 'when Mahatma speaks,' as noted by the President of the Congress Subhas Bose 'it does so in the language... of the *Bhagvant Gita* and the

saintly-cum-political outlook, identification with orthodox Hinduism and belief in the Hindu doctrine of *ahimsa* or non-violence as the mode to obtain *Swaraj*, naturally rendered him the prophet of Hindu India. Nehru was right in commenting that Gandhi's Hindu mantra 'with our (Hindu) background and tradition was the right policy for us (Hindus)'.⁴² But for the Muslims, who did not share Gandhi and Nehru's historic-religious past. Gandhi's repetition of 'Ram Raja',⁴³ as an ultimate goal for India, quite unfortunately appeared to be the desire of the Hindu who wanted to revive the golden Hindu age of Ram,⁴⁴ the age in which the Cow was worshipped as god and where the caste system did not have any active political role for lower and foreign castes.

B.R. Nanda and Parekh in their defence of Gandhi,⁴⁵ repudiated the anxieties which emerged among the Muslims regarding Gandhi's use of Ram Rajya as an ideal society for independent India. Mr. B.R. Nanda believes that by using Hindu terms and phrases, Gandhi was not referring to the unjust Hindu religious 'monarchical kingdom' of Hindu prophet Ram, 'but to an ideal polity, free from inequality, injustice and exploitation'.⁴⁶ However, the defence seems weak because it completely ignores the important literature which contained Gandhi's own words and statements where he himself declared his enthusiastic support for a class-divided society in which the Hindu elite was at the helm of the affairs, not on the basis of merit but due to the privilege of their birth.⁴⁷ And, furthermore, the matter is not as simple as Parekh and

Ramayana... he reminds them of the glorious Ramrajya... and they accepted him.' S. Bose, *The Indian Struggle 1920-1942* (Bombay: 1964), p.293.

42 Jawahral Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (London: 1946).

43 Gandhi stated: 'I have described Swaraj as Ramrajya and Ramrajya is an impossibility unless we have thousands of *Sitas* (The wife of Hindu prophet Ram). Gandhi quoted in *The Quintessence Gandhi in His Own Words* (Delhi: M.M. Publishers, 1984), p.51.

44 As noted by Bose 'when the Mahatma talks to them of Swaraj... . He reminds them of the glorious Ramrajya (the golden kingdom of Hindu prophet Ram)...', *op.cit.*, p.293.

45 B.R. Nanda, *Gandhi and His Critics* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985), p.74.

46 *Ibid.*, pp.73-74.

47 See for instance, "I believe that caste has saved Hinduism from disintegration. I consider the four divisions alone to be fundamental, natural and essential... I am certainly against any attempt at destroying the fundamental divisions. The caste

Nanda have presented. Mahatma Gandhi's open and unconditional support to the caste hierarchy with its social-political evils; his use of orthodox religion for the justification of traditional caste discriminations between the ruling classes and the servile lower classes; his determination to present Congress as the sole negotiator of power with Britain and his reluctance either to implement the Lucknow Pact or to explore a new power sharing deal with the Muslims became the root cause for the extermination of trust between the Hindu majority and Muslim minority. For the Muslims the matter had a clear religious implication. The acceptance or submission to the traditional Hindu philosophy, that is *ahimsa* and practices of 'spinning wheel', meant the complete negation to their Islamic culture and political past in India. Regardless of the question that to what extent *Satyagraha* contributed to the independence, one factor seems to be clear that its Hindu colour did not have much room and attraction for the Muslims of India. The Muslim leaders too described it as an attempt on the part of Gandhi and Congress, to establish Hindu Raj, as Shaukat Ali believed that would enforce perpetual domination of Muslims as second class citizens.⁴⁸ Muslim League's success as a separatist party in the elections of 1945-46 showed a complete detachment of Indian Muslims from the *Satyagraha* spirit of Hindu-Muslim unity. Although in N.W.F.P., a significant number of Muslims led by Khan Abdul Ghaffar organized themselves under the *Satyagraha* spirit of Indian nationalism yet the rejection of the politics of *Sarhadi Gandhi* and his Congress by the majority of Muslims of N.W.F.P. in the referendum for Pakistan, indicates that the Muslims of India were quite unwilling to listen to anything except the partition from Gandhi's *Satyagraha* spirit of united India.⁴⁹ The emergence and existence of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan seems to remain the living symbol of Gandhi's failure to change the heart of the second

system is not based on inequality' Gandhi quoted in B.R. Ambedkar, *Pakistan or the Partition of India* (Bombay: 1946), pp.454-55.

48 Shaukat Ali quoted in Khalid bin Sayeed, *Pakistan, the Formative Phase* (Karachi: 1960), p.61.

49 The Muslim League won 90% of the Muslim seats in the Provinces whereas it managed to sweep all the 30 Muslim seats at the Centre. See for reference, Panderal Moon, *Divide and Quit* (Delhi: 1998).

largest nation of the Subcontinent living along with Hindus for centuries. The above argument is supported by Dolton in such clear words. He observes that Gandhi failed to preserve united India because 'of his idea, leadership...it appears with hindsight that the strength of Hindu symbols, so evident in his ingenious use of language, proved also a weakness when it came to recruiting Muslims. It spoke to them of Hindu Raj.... India attained independence with civil war; Gandhi saw the national movement as not simply a failure, but as his failure, as a verdict of the way that he had misused Satyagraha and on India's inability to achieve true swaraj.'⁵⁰

Secondly, if Gandhi failed to preserve united India he did not succeed either to assimilate lower caste untouchables into common and higher society of India. It was one of the three goals which Gandhi conceived to achieve through *Satyagraha*. Gandhi worked hard for his cause. He opened *ashrams* in Ahmadabad and South Africa where untouchables were allowed to live freely with other communities. On the various occasions he declared unsociability as "miserable wretched enslaving spirit."⁵¹ Soon he associated *swaraj* with the freedom of rights for harijans and included them as partners in the Freedom Movements for India.⁵² Prof. Parekh too introduced Gandhi as a revolutionary Hindu who 'marginalized' the teachings of '*Sastras*' (sacred texts), broke the traditional 'religious basis of Brahminic authority' and alleviated the ranks of the untouchables as the 'privileged children of God'. For Parekh Gandhi's '*Sur-disation*' (Lower Class) of the religion curtailed the rights of the Brahman upper caste on one the hand and rendered the former as a great reformer on the other who wanted to establish a national culture of a classless 'Indian family.'⁵³ But Gandhi's critics labelled his efforts as attempts of an opportunist to exploit the voting power of untouchables for the establishment of Congress rule of elite classes. Gandhi's fasting of 1934 against the Communal Award (that conferred separate electorate for the

50 Dolton, p.121.

51 Gandhi quoted in Ambedkar, *Gandhi and Gandhism* (Jullander, Punjab: Bheem Patrika Publications, 1970), p.23.

52 *Ibid.*

53 B. Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy*, pp.108-09.

untouchables) is interpreted by the British Premier as 'solely to prevent the depressed classes... from being able to secure a limited number of representatives of their choosing speakers on their behalf in the legislature which will have dominating influence over their future.'⁵⁴ Secondly as noted by Parekh either Congress did not care for Gandhi's appeals or his *Satyagraha* failed to transform the prejudices of elites towards *Harijans*. Therefore, they never treated the untouchables seriously.⁵⁵ The untouchables never found preeminent place in the organization of civil disobedience and national decision-making of the Congress. It was a failure on the part of Gandhi that he did not succeed to train a single Harijan leader of equal stature. The only prominent leader of untouchables was Ambedker. Gandhi's *Satyagraha* failed to get his trust and therefore the cooperation of his community, who believed in Ambedker rather than Gandhi. And for Ambedker, Gandhi's movement of *Satyagraha* translated freedom in terms of the ascendancy of Hindu classes at the cost of the 'political rights of untouchables.'⁵⁶ This is probably the reason that independence of India failed to bring true freedom for the untouchables. Their conditions remained as deplorable and miserable as ever.

Thirdly, Gandhi's *Satyagraha* movement is being described or rather alleged, by the Marxist school, as an attempt to safeguard the interests of capitalist and industrialist classes at the expense of poor peasantry of India. It is suggested that Gandhi's selection to disobey salt tax rather than property was an attempt on his part to mobilize a huge number of peasantry to serve the interests of 'Indian Bourgeoisie' and business classes. This is the reason that

54 See British Prime Minister's reply to Gandhi's fast unto death and opposition to the special representation to the Untouchables, Dolton, p.111.

55 *Gandhi's Political Philosophy*, p.217.

56 Ambedkar the political leader of the Untouchables observes that 'my experience of cooperation with the Congress)... prove that while these leaders hope to achieve some object of their own by securing our cooperation they leave us finally in the lurch... Mr. Gandhi from his threatened immolation by sacrificing our political interest... Congress dominated by caste Hindus did not represent our right to elect through a panel of men who truly represented the wishes of our community; but on the other hand invited men of our community to join Congress promising them support of the caste Hindu majority. This naturally broke and weakened our own political organization and made our men the camp followers of the Congress.'
Dawn, 29 December 1942.

(besides the significant inclusion of peasants) Gandhi's *Satyagraha* failed to bring an agrarian or a socialist revolution against the lords and elites of India. It was the control of the capitalists over both Congress and Gandhi that turned the national *Satyagraha* movement into merely a tool to safeguard the interests of elite and industrialist classes.⁵⁷ Moreover, the Indian Marxist school represented by M.N. Roy through his book *India in Transition* and other articles raised certain 'great defects' in the Gandhi-led *Satyagraha*. First of all, it was an idealist and 'futile' programme that stressed on the establishment of an idealist society based on cultural and social homogeneity. It missed the point that class conflict was an inevitable reality of any rational society. Secondly, independence and progress of India highly depended upon an economic reform programme rather than 'metaphysical' type *Satyagraha*. For Roy, Gandhi's involvement of religion into politics was an extreme folly that would take India backward from the age of science to that of stone. Lastly, Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence lacked revolutionary zeal. It was merely a passive and inefficient method that could neither bring social reforms nor political liberation for India. Though, Roy acknowledged that the leadership of Gandhi transformed the Indian nationalist movement into an active struggle. But, he adds that without the participation of Indian proletariat the movement could never revolutionize the social, economic and political lives of Indians.⁵⁸

Fourthly, R. Tagore, the leading poet-philosopher of Bengal, emerged as a critic of western concept of nationalism. For Tagore, nationalism was a cruel epidemic of evil which overran the

57 Mr. Gandhi revealed to Mr. Louis Fischer on June 6, 1942 the following confession: 'Mr. Fischer writes: 'I said I had several questions to ask him [Gandhi] about the Congress party. Very highly placed Britishers, I recalled, had told me that Congress was in the hands of big business and that Mr. Gandhi was supported by the Bombay mill owners who gave him as much money as he wanted. 'What truth is there in these assertions,' I asked, 'unfortunately, they are true,' Gandhi declared simply. 'Congress hasn't enough money to conduct its work. We thought in the begging to collect four *Anas* (eight pence) from each member per year and operate on that. But it has 'not worked.' 'What proportion of the Congress budget,' I asked, 'is covered by rich Indians?' 'Practically all of it,' he stated. 'In this ashram, for instance, we could live much poorly than we do and spend less money. But we do not and the money comes from our rich friends.' L.Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (New York: 1950), pp.115-16.

58 M.N. Roy, *India in Transition* (Bombay: Nachiketa Publication, 1971), pp.45-49.

individual liberty as well as moral-ethical spirit of human soul. He thought that western nationalism would aggravate the human sufferings and would lead to the 'tyranny of injustice'.⁵⁹ Tagore's rejection of nationalism brought him in direct opposition to the staunch Indian nationalist like Gandhi. First of all, Tagore slammed the so-called moral force of non-cooperation as it aimed at incapacitating the 'spiritual freedom of India'.⁶⁰ For Tagore Gandhi's spinning clothe, and burning foreign clothes were 'dogmatic' methods that could never bring real '*swaraj*' to India. On the other hand, they rather hindered the economic progress and isolated India from rest of the modern world. Moreover, he conceived Gandhi's treatment of nationalism as 'isolatory', and 'conflicting,'⁶¹ and short-sighted phenomenon that lacked scientific reasoning and knowledge. If India follows his path of *Satyagraha*, she would lag behind in the modern age of science.

Fifthly, a steam of criticism came from the Liberal School of India represented by Chimanlal Setalvad. He was upset with the involvement of youth in the *Satyagraha* movements. He questioned Gandhi that if once his *Satyagraha* exposed to the 'younger generation the idea of direct action, the idea of disobeying laws'⁶² what would be the future of peace and stability in the post-independence India? In other words, Gandhi's civil disobediences aimed at establishing a political culture where the masses under the moral justification of 'non-violence' easily and frequently defied the policies and laws of their national government. Gandhi replied that it was legitimate for a citizen of a nation to disobey even the law of his own government, if the law violated the standards of morality and justice. This was the reason, as analyzed by Dolton that Gandhi launched his massive civil disobedience movement in 1930 against the 'salt tax' that declined to provide the basic necessity (like salt) to the Indians.⁶³ But this argument does not fully explain that how this Civil Disobedience

59 R. Tagore, *Towards Universal Man* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1961), pp.250-55.

60 *Ibid.*

61 *Ibid.*

62 Dolton, pp.89-90.

63 *Ibid.*, p.96.

would prevent the spread of violence? The incident of Chaura Chauri indicates (in which 'non-violent' protesters under the spirit of *ahimsa* or *Satyagraha* burned 22 policemen and a police station), that things can become worse in the absence of the leaders like Gandhi who could alone organize, command and prevent the protesters from violence.

Sixthly, the theory of *Satyagraha* can be challenged on the epistemological basis. The theory of 'relative truth' which is the moral foundation of *Satyagraha*, denies in reality the establishment of a community based on common ideas. If, as suggest by Gandhi every individual conceived the truth differently from his own angle how could ever a consensus be formulated on social and political issues? The same principle of freedom legitimized dictators like Hitler to implement the 'truth' according to their own standards and conviction. Gandhi, therefore, though called Hitler 'mad' yet disallowed the use of violence against him, 'either to tolerate him or... allow hundreds of lives to be sacrificed' in order to change his 'stony heart'. But one could not say that by the time the 'stony hearts' melted down how many hearts and throats of non-violent protesters would have been thwarted? At the domestic level, adherence to the moral legitimacy of dominant groups (such as selfish, imperialist and capitalist classes) can only lead to the continuation of several 'injustices' in the society. The consequences can be severe. The theory of non-violence not only initiates violence against its own followers, but also discourages the victims to such an extent that they might not think it worth while to put in a fight.

Satyagraha appears to be a partial theory of non-violence that fails to recognize the inevitability of conflicts and evil. Gandhi denies or ignores the necessity of violence and conflict as its very acceptance challenges the basic foundations of his theory (of non-violence) and conception of a moral peaceful man. The results of such a naïve approach were dreadful. First of all, Gandhi thought such a fighter failed to take his *Satyagraha* beyond certain limits. He compromised on occasions even without attaining the full objectives. His *Satyagraha* Movement in South Africa did not bring any major change to the grievances of Indians. As soon as he left South Africa the conditions became more 'vicious and

continuous to prevail for a long time.’⁶⁴ Secondly, he failed to uproot the evil of ‘inter-communal violence.’ The civil war before the partition (that inflicted the miseries over millions), the Hindu Muslim riots of 1992 in Bombay and recently the Gujarat (2002), all indicate the failure of his methodology that claimed to replace violence with love and peace. The above discussion has taken us to another important sphere, regarding the universal implication and international utility of *Satyagraha* methodology. Could Gandhi’s *Satyagraha* be effectively employed against the harsh governments like the Fascist Italy or Nazi Germany? For the supporters of Gandhi if the Jews of Germany had used non-violent sufferings against Hitler they would have brought the world’s support on their back and compelled Hitler to stop the genocide.⁶⁵ Gandhi himself believed that ‘*Satyagraha* can and does work in the teeth of the fieriest opposition’, if the Jews of Germany use the power of their ‘soul’ derived from ‘non-violence’... Hitler bows before their (Jew’s) courage.’⁶⁶ But on this occasion, Gandhi misses an important point. Contrary to the flexible British Raj, which was accountable to Liberal government at home as well as to an open national media, the Jews of Germany were facing the wrath of the worst dictatorship of its time. Hitler was unrestrained for the use of violence and massacre under the ideology of militant nationalism.⁶⁷ Gandhi’s *Satyagraha* fails to provide a practical solution to such an awkward condition where the slightest resistance meant complete annihilation or torture in the concentration camps. In other words, Gandhi’s method could not be employed everywhere and against everyone. It definitely suffers from serious limitations, particularly when it is directed against totalitarian regimes like Mussolini or Hitler’s, which did not hesitate to kill even their nationals if it contributed to the consolidation of their power. For this reason, Dolton remarks that Gandhi’s *Satyagraha* movement failed to provide ‘even a hint of a practical programme of action’ for the ‘oppressed’ like the Jews.

64 R.A. Huttenback, *Gandhi in South Africa* (USA: Cornell University Press, 1971), p.39.

65 Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence*, p.134.

66 Gandhi wrote in *Harijan*, November 26, 1938.

67 Ronald J. Tarcheck, *Gandhi Struggle for Autonomy* (USA: Rowman and Littlefield Press, 1998), p.22-32.

Dolton adds 'he seemed unable... to grasp the enormity of holocaust.'⁶⁸

The more one discusses the logic of non-violence or 'suffering of love', the more one explores the defects in the theory and practice of *Satyagraha*. The 'suffering of love' in Gandhi has its limits. The human beings (or participants of civil disobediences) could not suffer or act beyond their capacity. The things can become worse when the participants of non-violence creed had to face a foreign prejudiced government like that of Great Britain who had the least interest in the miseries of their colonial citizens. The 'suffering of love' or sacrificing one's life in the name of '*ahimsa*' could hardly change the imperialist attitudes towards the sufferers. The non-violent civil disobediences in South Africa initiated government to reinforce her power more harshly than ever. It demoralized the participation and led to the decline in their number.⁶⁹ In India Gandhi's non-violence force did neither touch the moral instincts of enemy (The Government of Punjab in this case) nor did it prevent the massacre of hundreds in Jallianwallah Bagh Tragedy. Such experiences compelled Gandhi to introduce the elements of 'force' and coercion into his strategy. The introduction of 'economic boycotts', 'non-violent raids non-payments of taxes', did not aim merely on the 'suffering of love' alone. They rather contained the elements of 'force and 'coercion' in order to compel the government to listen to the demands of Gandhi and party. The limitations and difficulties in the practical implementation of *Satyagraha* as a solely moral force is evident from the fact that its founder, Gandhi not only brought 'radical changes' in its nature, but also started describing it as a 'non-violent warfare', a 'peaceful rebellion.'⁷⁰ He probably realized that the 'stony heart' of the British Empire could not be melted with a passive gesture of suffering of love.

For the advocates of Gandhi like Bondurant, the *Satyagraha* merely contains a 'positive element of coercion'. But for the realists like Mark Shepard *Satyagraha*, aroused 'public sympathy'

68 Dolton, p.135.

69 J.M. Brown, *Gandhi's Rise to Power* (Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp.22-32.

70 *Collected Works*, Vol.2, pp.78-79.

for the cause and brought them on streets, where they broke law 'politely' and 'forced the government to negotiate with Mahatma. For Mark, coercion and use of force in these movements were hidden or 'indirect' i.e. it came from the public rather than from the leaders. Moreover, instead of changing the heart of the opponents or governments it changed the heart of 'public'.⁷¹ This analysis can be supported with the tragedy of Chauri Chaura where the participants of 'non-violence' *Satyagraha* committed the serious level of violence and assaulted twenty-two people including a child of a sub-inspector of police. The question that arises here is that if in order to encounter a lesser evil like the British Empire of India, Gandhi had to change his strategy of non-violence and had to include the elements of power, force and coercion in the *Satyagraha* what further violent changes he might have practised, if he had to face giant monsters like Nazi Germany or Yugoslavia under Millosovitch?

The seventh point of argument is that the national culture evolved by the *Satyagraha* movement (as claimed by Parekh) failed to touch various important organizational aspects of and political and national unity. The Congress had neither transformed to a coherent and united organization nor it ever provided enough room for a national level consensus among various groups of the country. Its failure to include prominent Muslims and leaders from other castes (especially the untouchables) made it a loose coalition with poor discipline and weak internal unity. It coordinated and showed discipline only when Gandhi started long interval local of national *Satyagraha*. It was thus merely a one-man show highly dependent upon the charismatic leadership of Gandhi. The *Satyagraha* failed to develop a national-level movement on a permanent basis. The Depressed Classes of India seemed right in justifying their alienation from the *Satyagraha* spirit of nationalism in such words as 'Congress dominated by caste Hindus did not represent our right to elect through a panel of men who truly represented the wishes of our community: but on the other hand, invited men of our community to join Congress promising them support of the caste Hindu majority. This naturally broke and

71 Mark Shepard, *Gandhi and his Myths* (London: 2002), p.78.

weakened our own political organization and made our men the camp followers of the Congress.’⁷²

Lastly, even his own people and his own party did not believe (whole-heartedly) in attaining independence and administer the country under his non-violent spirit of *Satyagraha*. The situation became more severe when the defence of India had been threatened by the possible Japanese invasion during the World War II. Gandhi under the spell of *Satyagraha* declared that India just on the basis of her indomitable will and faith and *ahimsa* would overcome the enemy. As the War came closer ‘Gandhi felt more strongly than ever at the moment of crises...he and India had a message for the World.... He expounded the non-violent approach to aggression and tyranny.’⁷³ Gandhi School of Non-Violence demanded extreme level of sacrifice which even his own party was not prepared to follow. All India Congress including his political heir Nehru, rejected his non-violence as a creed that was valid and practical ‘in all situation and circumstance.’⁷⁴ Once the Congress had used Gandhi’s political power of masses and got closer to independence, that is the transfer of power, Gandhi and his philosophy of love and peace appear to have become irrelevant and impractical. Gandhi, therefore, was being marginalized from the politics and for Parekh, this situation led to his ‘eventual disillusionment.’⁷⁵

Conclusion

Did Gandhi fail? This is a difficult question to answer as there are or may be different standards and criteria to judge his *Satyagraha* movement. From one aspect one has found Gandhi extremely successful. His three decades of national leadership transformed the whole body politic of India. The miserable and frightened Indians (of British imperialism) had gained a far superior self-confidence. Then they were ready to defy fearlessly the unjust laws of an imperialist empire. Secondly, the traditional Hinduism had been revived. This generation checked further

72 Ambedkar quoted in *Dawn*, 29 December 1942.

73 *Ibid.*, pp.425-26.

74 Nanda, p.143.

75 *Gandhi's Political Philosophy*, p.225.

disintegration of India's cultural and social heritage at the hands of modern materialist civilization. Thirdly, the democratic and secular spirit of *Satyagraha* arguably paved the way for Indian unity. It transformed the scattered groups and divergent voices into a strong and coherent Indian nationalism. Last but not the least, the orthodoxy, which had been the stumbling block to the progress of Indians was severely affected. India might never have experienced the iron lady Indira Gandhi, had the Gandhi-led *Satyagraha* movement not broken the orthodox path, by making women an equal partner of Indian freedom movement.

But apart from his achievements, when one conceives Gandhi from a different critical angle his successes appear to be marginalized. His *Satyagraha* movement appeared to establish the 'Hindu mind' in the 'Muslim body', ironically this led to the collapse of Indian unity. Gandhi probably failed to understand the distinct and independent nature of Islam; otherwise, he would never have attempted to submerge Muslims into Hinduism. It dashed to ground Gandhi's main goal to secure independence of united India with the division of India separation of Muslims and emergence of sovereign Islamic state of Pakistan. Along with this he also failed to uproot the seeds of extremism from the Hindu-dominated Indian society. The demolition of Babri Mosque under the very supervision of Provincial Government, Bombay riots (1992) and recent Gujarat riots (that took the lives of thousands), indicate that the Indians have failed him in his quest to institutionalize the principle of non-violence, *ahimsa*, love for others or *Satyagraha* i.e., the tolerance and suffering for others.

Besides, it would be rather unfair, if one fails to appreciate the politically significant role Gandhi and his *Satyagraha* movement played for the achievement of the independence of India. Gandhi through *Satyagraha* brought the politics to the grassroots level, made all the Indians equal partners in the struggle for autonomy, directed their whole strength against the 'British Raj', and claimed and achieved independence. Indians followed Gandhi not because he appeared to them, as a simple and saintly person who staunchly believed in the Hindu religion and tradition. If that would have been the case then there were many other great social, national and religious reformers, yet no one touched even the shred of success,

which Gandhi alone had achieved. It was the versatile, practical nature of *Satyagraha* technique that made him far superior than his contemporaries in the context of independence. The leader like Bal Ganga Dhar Tilak and critics like Tagore and M.N. Roy, though had theories and ideas of freedom and nationalism, but they lacked the method to translate them into a grand nationalist movement. Gandhi had both. Gandhi though remained committed to democracy and non-violence used the platform of massive *Satyagraha* in the form of civil disobediences and economic and political boycotts, transformed his ideas of power and freedom into a practical reality and achieved independence for India. It appears as if where the extremists like Tilak, nationalists like Tagore and Marxists like M.N. Roy failed. Gandhi succeeded.