

SOCIAL DYNAMICS IN INDIAN SOCIETY A GANDHIAN PERSPECTIVE OF NON-VIOLENT ACTION

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Abstract: The social dynamics in any society and its inner urge to rebuild itself is an ever increasing area of interest for academicians and social thinkers. Every free society is expressing itself and its social dynamics works for its actions and reasons. It is empowered with the process of reformation, revival and rebuilding. The term nonviolence indicates non-hurting or non-injuring behaviour while engaging with others; obviously, the 'others' include the nature and the universe at large. Mahatma Gandhi believed that the human society is gradually progressing towards a non-violent entity. Therefore, one needs to accelerate this process by consciously intervening and expanding the various facets of nonviolent actions. For Gandhi Nonviolence was a means to achieve the goal of truth. So he insisted the means should be as pure as the end and he argued "as the means; so the end." This paper attempts to portray the historical aberration of non violence, Gandhian approaches to overcome and purifying the violent nature of humans by adopting his fundamental thoughts of *satyagraha*, *swaraj* and *swadeshi*.

Keywords: Non-Violence, Pluralism, Democracy, Social Stratification, Civil Disobedience.

I. INTRODUCTION

The social dynamics in Indian society is inherently less turbulent and comparatively more nonviolent in nature or in other words, there is ample scope for the search for a nonviolent social order. The social dynamics in Indian society is inclined towards nonviolent behaviour as there is rich cultural heritage taking back to the hundreds of years. The existence of pluralistic nature of society and the evolution of modern democratic system, and the cultural confluence underlines the inner consciousness of a peaceful Indian society. The practice of nonviolent movement under Mahatma Gandhi and his vision of nonviolent society proclaims, perhaps, the arrival of a new social order sooner or later, devoid of all kinds of violence.

II. SOCIAL DYNAMICS

It is pointed out that social dynamics can refer to the behaviour of groups those results from the interactions of individual group members as well to the study of the relationship between individual interactions and group level behaviors.¹To understand the social dynamism of a society is to understand the nature and pattern of social relationships that shape and reshape the social norms and social progress. In a pluralistic and democratic society like India where various sections of society live interrelated and interdependent and at the same time, making all efforts to reinforce the progressive features, nurturing its rich cultural heritage and find ways and means to resolve conflicts; obviously, social dynamics in such a society is complex in nature.

The progressive minds always urge to unfold the new treasure of knowledge and make use of them for betterment of society. Generally, the war, conflicts, discrimination and social taboos hamper the progressive march of human society. Admitting the fact that the outcome of the conflicting elements too carries seeds of social change, there are various noble streams of movement that materialize what is known as 'progressive change.' Therefore, what should be the paradigm for intermingling of various sections of people that constitute a healthy relation? Obviously, laid down rules or written pieces

of law cannot ultimately guarantee peace and tranquillity; instead certain democratic values of sharing and coexistence would ensure healthy social life. In such a society, there would naturally evolve proper mechanism to resolve conflicts or divergent interests. The forces of social dynamics in that society need to be explored and they should be accelerated for evolving constructive social progress with minimum damages.

It is argued in this paper that the driving force behind mutual relation and problem solving mechanism should be based on the principle of non-violence and India could be a testing ground for such a nonviolent revolution. The pluralistic nature of society itself is a testimony of democratic spirit in society. It is imperative, in every sense, that the existence of the humanity, may the nature itself, is depend on to what extent the man is successful in giving up his weapons which abundantly carry fire power in various degrees for mass destruction. The most challenging question is whether man has the trust in him to avoid the strenuous circumstances of building up suspicion and quarrels; thereby neutralizing the conflicts.

Much to the dismay, what is not being duly highlighted in social relationship is the man's robust story of mutual relationships, love, care and stewardship displayed more often than not in normal as well as extraordinary situations. Interestingly, the human society has been continuously revealed itself and its thread of cooperation and give and take relationship in taking forward in the act of better understanding. His unadulterated friendship with the immediate neighbourhood has been evolved through various stages, responding to the need of the day to day life. Man's close links with others and innate nature to connect with all natural entities around him/her needs to be highlighted. It could be observed, if one closely observe, the way the animals or insects make a relationship with the immediate surroundings, aptly responding to the favourable natural surroundings. Humanity does have the same inclination. Therefore there is clarion call by naturalists to return to the nature to learn many things newly and unlearn many wretched things he developed by wrongly understanding the tune of nature. The non-violent approach is complementary to the natural behaviour and it can connect with healthy environment.

The society is like a living body in which the worn out cells are replaced with fresh healthy ones, the society has the inner strength to reform and rebuild every moment, according to its need. The social dynamics are the factors that influence social change. The social behaviour, cultural factors, economy, politics and many such other factors invariably related to social dynamics. Many important factors that shaping the social dynamics in India is her rich cultural heritage, its emphasis on moral and ethical behaviour, and its deep religious inclination, existence of social fabric that strengthen plural social structure, collective efforts in community living etc.

III. COMPLEXITY OF INDIAN SOCIETY

Indian society having ancient cultural heritage is complex in nature. What is termed as 'unity in diversity' reveals the existence of various sections living together. The social stratification based on economic, caste, regional or any other divisions make way for social tensions and conflicts in peculiar nature. The Urban-rural division, gender injustice, patriarchal value systems, feudal norms, caste hierarchy and discrimination based on caste identity, social exclusion causing to surface the voice of discontents in numerous ways. The religious fundamentalism, political violence, and corruption plague the country. Social dynamism in such a society would be more complex and volatile. The continuous process of making and breaking social norms mark the phenomenon of social dynamics works like an active volcano in Indian society with large population. Social dynamics in Indian society has been impregnated with the potential of nonviolent social order, enriched by century long process of social transformation.

IV. INDIAN SOCIAL DYNAMICS AND NONVIOLENCE - ASCETICISM, PLURALISM, DHARMA

Human progress in society is a continuous process. The efforts to reform Indian society have been dominated by spiritual masters since ancient to modern times that indicates the fundamental nature of society. Social dynamics in India is fundamentally driven by three factors; they are Code of Asceticism, Code of Pluralism and the Code of Dharma. During various stages of social progress, one could see the presence of these factors in various degrees. Obviously, the principle of nonviolence is more in consensus with asceticism, pluralism and code of dharma.

The Jain Theerthankar, Vardhaman Mahavir and Gautama Buddha who led the social reform movement before two millenniums were the ardent nonviolent campaigners. They laid the foundations of building a nonviolent social order in India. In the same way, the social reform movements which is generally termed as '*Bhakti movement*' in various regions

of medieval India had been primarily driven by spiritual masters including saint-poets, created lasting impressions of social behaviour on Indian minds. Moreover, the Indian freedom struggle, barring the bloody confrontation of indigenous groups, against the foreign forces was largely free from violent outbursts. During the latter part of the movements when Gandhi dominated the political scenario, the struggle was by and large directed towards nonviolent movement.

V. CONCEPTUALIZING SOCIAL DYNAMICS OF NON-VIOLENCE

According to Gene Sharp, “The term nonviolent action refers to those methods of protest, noncooperation, and intervention in which the actionists, without employing physical violence, refuse to do certain things which they are expected, or required, to do; or do certain things which they are not expected, or are forbidden, to do. In a particular case there can of course be a combination of acts of omission and acts of commission.”³

Gandhi wrote, “Non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man.”⁴ Nonviolence opens up numerous ways of interconnecting with other people and all other natural entities. The Indian history tells about numerous wars and conflicts, endless stories of battle, massacre, injury, torture and pain. From the mystical Kurushetra war, the gruesome Kalinga battle of Asoka, adventurous violent campaigns of Alexander, conquests by various foreign forces, the colonial conquest of European powers, the Two World Wars thus the reams and reams of pages of history are filled with the horrors of war. Thus, any discussion about the non-violent struggle needs to be understood at the backdrops of violent phase of the human history. It is said history is written in the way they (historians/writers) wanted to write. The anecdotes of nonviolent struggles were not given due attention and importance as the history without wars seemed to be like hollow talk. In fact, written history was filled with the celebration of the victor and humiliation of the vanquished. Despite the fact remains; the voice of non violence was not so feeble; but it has never been given prime importance while carving out history.

It is a misconception that the wars built up the countries. It is in fact, the forces cooperation and social cohesion that built up empires. The toil and moil of the numerous ‘faceless’ people, that paved the corner stone of the hugely established empires. The historians celebrated the victory of the ruler; while ignored the sweat and tears of the large mass of people. The peace and tranquillity that existed at the ordinary village life even during the troubled political scenario was overlooked. The contribution of the productive forces and abundance wealth creation through the hard work of the layman eventually made the affluent Indian kingdom in large numbers. Ironically, this huge wealth invited the foreign invasions beginning from Mohammad Ghazni (Ghazni attacked India 17 times during the period between 1000 and 1027 AD) to the British.

VI. NONVIOLENCE REINTERPRETED BY MAHATMA GANDHI

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, adorably known as “Mahatma”, was on a continuous war path, of course, a war of an entirely different concept, content, and context. Finally, the assassination of Gandhi in 1948 proved his credential and elevated him to the gallery of great heroes of the world. Gandhi’s assassination, a pure case of martyrdom for a cause that he adamantly upheld and at its end he had to pay the price of his benevolence in the context of rising slogans of eye for an eye communal rampage during the partition of India with Pakistan.

What made Gandhi to a votary of nonviolence and how he chiselled out his tool, perfected the art, and prepared the theatre of war in a massive scale suggest valuable lessons of nonviolent resistance for the time to come. This article is aimed at to focus on how Gandhi prepared the ground for a massive nonviolent campaign. Gandhi organised many struggles both in India and South Africa. His intervention was strategically organized and philosophically superior.

A nonviolent intervention while opposing the cruel colonial forces was historic. The victory of any kind in the struggle against such a hugely armed monstrous colonial Britain was not in anybody’s wildest dreams. But Gandhi was waging a war not to defeat them, but to renovate them; so that victory in a battle was far from Gandhi’s non-violent agenda.

When analyzing his adherence to the non-violent method, it is evident that non-violent means was more than a technique or a tool for Gandhi. It is the core principle of his philosophy. He propagated nonviolent method both in philosophy and in action. This cardinal principle was entrapped in cage of dogmatic religious versions and futile chanting of brahmanistic order. Gandhi liberated it and demonstrated it in public space opening up a new war front to which his opponents were unaware about how to deal with it. Interestingly, Gandhi used myths and symbols that were strong in the public imagination, to convince the efficacy of nonviolence. He frequently referred Mahavir, Buddha and Christ to endorse his noble method of action.

VII. THE THEATRE OF NONVIOLENT WAR

Since the implication of non-violence campaign is wider in its application and deeper in its understanding, every act needs to be qualified as in accordance with the natural law of non-violent principle. The operational part of the non-violence involves both individual and collective efforts in every aspects of life. In fact, the nonviolent means he experimented could not be weighed as mere an individual virtue; instead it should be perceived as a cardinal principle that is central to the philosophy of life. In a sense, Gandhi demystified the traditional spiritual practice and tested the value of nonviolence in the day to day life of the layman. Gandhi was of the view that one needs to be self-disciplined and qualified to become a nonviolent practitioner whom he termed as *satyagrahi*. A true *satyagrahi* is not worried too much about whom he happened to confront. Unlike in the violent struggle, the strength or weakness of the opponent is not an important factor in *satyagraha*. A *satyagrahi* appeals on the conscience of the opponent and believes in basic goodness of every human being. Thus nonviolent means is entirely a different philosophy of resisting evil.

It can obviously reinvigorate the social dynamism bringing into a new paradigm of relationship and coherence. The non-violent force naturally eases the bitterness but it sharpens the individual conflicts. In other words, the application of nonviolence creates fissures in existing norms of ordinary life. Continuous engagement in the acts of self-purification and the resultant conflicts would naturally make a *satyagrahi* nobler in his ways and greater in his actions. Obviously, a *satyagrahi* invite conflict situations due to his persistent truthful ways. Such conflicts are the kind of creative conflicts, constantly progressing towards the greater understanding by the *satyagraha*. There is reference about such a conflict in the Bible and it says, "They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."⁵ (The Bible. Luke, Chapter: 12, 53). Such conflicts are unavoidable as the existing system is build up on the brute force of violence and untruth.

It is also expression of the inner conflicts of an individual when one begins to follow the path of nonviolence adhering to truth. As Gandhi suggests it is a continuous process of self-purification. Therefore, a thorough preparation of body, mind and soul is necessary for the formation of a *satyagrahi*.

VIII. PREPARATION

Gandhi was of the opinion that when one engages oneself in a nonviolent campaign, there needs a lots of preparation for the same- both at the individual and social perspective. According to Gandhi the nonviolent campaign was not just confrontation; instead it is more of a constructive work and the *satyagrahi* get social acceptance and abundance of moral courage to question the wrong doings from the constructive activities. It also provides an opportunity for the *satyagrahi* to interact with the people and get first-hand information about the problems of the people.

As every action of a *satyagrahi* is significant to the extent that it makes impact on the whole process of social activism of *satyagraha*. Gandhi suggested following rules while engaging in *satyagraha* campaign:

1. Nonviolence (ahimsa)
2. Truth – this includes honesty, but goes beyond it to mean living fully in accord with and in devotion to that which is true
3. Not stealing
4. Non-possession (not the same as poverty)
5. Body-labor or bread-labor
6. Control of the palate
7. Fearlessness
8. Equal respect for all religions
9. Economic strategy such as boycott of exported goods (swadeshi)

Gandhi also insisted a strict code of conduct for those who engage in nonviolent campaign. He wrote the following strictures in *Young India on 27 February 1930*

- (i) A satyagrahi, i.e., a civil resister, will harbour no anger.
- (ii) He will suffer the anger of the opponent.
- (iii) In so doing he will put up with assaults from the opponent, never retaliate; but he will not submit, out of fear of punishment or the like, to any order given in anger.
- (iv) When any person in authority seeks to arrest a civil resister, he will voluntarily submit to the arrest, and he will not resist the attachment or removal of his own property, if any, when it is sought to be confiscated by authorities.
- (v) If a civil resister has any property in his possession as a trustee, he will refuse to surrender it, even though in defending it he might lose his life. He will, however, never retaliate.
- (vi) Non-retaliation excludes swearing and cursing.
- (vii) Therefore a civil resister will never insult his opponent, and therefore also not take part in many of the newly coined cries which are contrary to the spirit of ahimsa.
- (viii) A civil resister will not salute the Union Jack, nor will he insult it or officials, English or Indian.
- (ix) In the course of the struggle if anyone insults an official or commits an assault upon him, a civil resister will protect such official or officials from the insult or attack even at the risk of his life.

IX. NON-VIOLENCE: IN TUNE WITH THE NATURE

It can be professed that the method of nonviolence is more in tune with the natural law of mutual assistance and existence. A conscious attempt needs to be made to nurture the perverted human character into its original form. It is in tune with the nature because, the inherent tendency of a living things to be in cohesion with one another is a natural inclination; nonviolence takes the practitioner to ally with the natural tendency of being connected to one another. The dependency of one agent in nature for its survival on another is the interconnecting force that envelops the nature. As long as this force of interlinking exists, there would be a balance in this nature. Nonviolence ensures this force to work unabated. In this sense Nonviolence is an active force recognizing and aligning with the original character of a being.

X. THE HUMAN AGENCY AND NONVIOLENCE

It has been a continuous debate whether the man is autonomous agent in nature to decide what to or what not to do. However, what is pointed out here man's active involvement in shaping and reshaping the human action in tune with the natural tendency of being connected to the immediate surroundings. While engaging oneself in social sphere, he has to confront various forces knowingly or unknowingly and get entrapped in a dilemma of; whether to act or not to act, or how to react to given situation in tune with the natural law. In this critical juncture, Gandhi suggests a talisman; to be adhering to the path of truth and nonviolence. To be precise 'being truthful is to be natural.' Truth is real and it exists without any external support. However, since there are different perceptions of truth by different people and on different contexts (what Gandhi called as relative truth), there bound to be conflicts. Two different opinions (two relative truths) on a particular matter lead to mutual conflict. To establish one over the other cannot be in any way a violent task. If the physical force is applied there arose suppression, suspicion and injustice. In such circumstances, the truth will be in causality. Therefore, nonviolence is imperative in establishing truth. The methods of nonviolent technique are successfully tested by Gandhi in his life time.

XI. THE TECHNIQUES OF NONVIOLENCE BY GANDHI

Gandhi had a vast canvas of social sphere in colonial era in South Africa and in India where he tested the strength of nonviolence means while dealing with his version of relative truth. Beginning from confronting the unjust social practice of discrimination against the Indians (including the black community), the fight for justice extended till the end of his life. Throughout his active involvement in public matters, his intervention was nonviolent actions, which were evaluating the merit of nonviolent means. Gandhi elaborated the concept of nonviolence, fine-tuned its techniques and sharpened the tool of resistance. He placed the virtue of nonviolence godly and a perfect way of self-purification. By placing Non-

violence at the centre of social action, apart from rejecting the murder or political violence in all forms, Gandhi positively eliminated the possibility of increasing mistrust, mutual disrespect and segregation of communities in any circumstances. Thus the vibrancy of nonviolence goes beyond the purview of conflict resolution, as more often than not the principle is narrowly interpreted. The purity of nonviolent means was as good as the natural law. Those who follow the nonviolence naturally follow the natural law; in every sense both are complementary and supplementary to each other. Thus the concern of the immediate neighbour is extended to the all living and non-living things, giving material shape to the nonviolent natural law.

XII. THE NONVIOLENCE IN ACTION

Gandhi evolved a series of techniques for campaign while strictly adhering to the principle of nonviolence. They broadly include three nonviolent methods-

(i) Noncooperation (ii) Civil Disobedience (iii) Fasting

1. Noncooperation urges the people not to cooperate with the opponent in every possible means. The tools like boycott return of titles, honours and rejecting all kinds of favours'. Gandhi effectively employed these methods during the noncooperation movement in India in 1920-22.

2. Civil disobedience involves techniques such as disobey the law implemented by an oppressive authority. The techniques of disobeying the law include not paying the tax. Breaking the law in a civilized manner is a powerful weapon nonviolence method. Gandhi demonstrated it in the salt *satyagraha* of 1930.

3. The method of fasting may be followed in two ways- (i) fasting for a stipulated days or fast unto death. Gandhi suggested fasting both as an act self purification and a weapon of *satyagraha*. Gandhi took 5 days fast in 1922 after the withdrawal of the noncooperation movement as an act of atonement; pointing out that the movement slipped into violent incidents. Fast unto death or till the declared goal is achieved is the most powerful weapon in the hands of a *satyagahi*. Gandhi took fast indefinite fast until the demands were met in 1932. It cannot be undermined that the fast undertaken by Gandhi has a spiritual dimension and he elaborated it in his own writings.

The nonviolent struggle also include methods such as (i) Picketing, sit-in, strikes, public meetings, processions, protest marches etc.

The strength of Gandhian *satyagraha* depends on the public participation. The mass movement has the strength to shake foundations of widely armed powerful state authority. Therefore Gandhi termed it as truth force and soul force. The power of a *satyagrahi* is generated through the constructive program he or she undertakes. Active involvement in constructive program empower the *satyagrahi* to interact with people and make a truthful opinion of his or her own before entering into direct action or agitation.

XIII. FUTURE COURSE OF NONVIOLENT ACTION

The humanity is tired of war and the world is at the verge of severe damages due to war and conflicts. It has proven that the strategy (war) employed by man to resolve mutual conflicts have been miserably failed. The amicable way to eliminate war and establish peaceful method of conflict resolution is the need of the hour. As Gandhi wrote "Peace will not come out of a clash of arms but out of justice lived and done by unarmed nations in the face of odds."

In fact, peace in the world is as important as peace in the country or in the community or in the family. Obviously a nonviolent approach can make one's life peaceful and healthy. The existence of a peaceful society is invariably linked to a just society. Social justice, equality and fraternity would be the focal point in a nonviolent society. A nonviolent social order would be materialized only when a system based on the principle of the welfare of all (*sarvodya*), trusteeship (a system in which the wealth and resources are primarily used for common good) is established.

The environmental degradation and ecological disaster force humanity to rethink on the reckless use of resources. The slogan of sustainable development is gradually getting global recognition. In this context, idea of a nonviolent economy comprising the system of small scale production, use of *swadeshi* goods (goods produced from the nearest possible locality) and *swaraj* (Self rule) would be the fundamental principles of a nonviolent social order to which India can take lead.

XIV. CONCLUSION

India is inclined for a nonviolent social order as the society had been the testing ground for noble principles in thought and action. A country where so many religions evolved, rich literature created, glorious tradition health care (Ayurveda system) nurtured, yoga, martial arts, eco-friendly architecture and various art forms developed on different historical contexts, can promise the arrival of new awakening spearheading a nonviolent revolution. The forces of social dynamics for such a constructive revolution are implanted in human mind. The power of nonviolence is far superior to the power of destructive weapons; whenever man gathers courage to give a chance for nonviolence, the conflicts would be turned to be a matter of debate for finding better options; moreover, the creative mind of humanity would be used for constructive projects. The new possibilities of nonviolent society are unimaginable as the present world is contrary to such a glorious world.

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