CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Philosophy as we understand it, explores different concepts and ideas which are of prime significance in the ways we live. It gives a deeper insight into the fundamental concepts of life. Political Philosophy, a branch of philosophy deals with the study of people in society focusing especially on the claims one bears on another in the form of rights and obligations and their demands for justice, equality and liberty. The other task of political philosophy is conceptual analysis and clarification of political concepts. My research project focuses on these aspects of philosophy.

Civilization, as we know, needs certain essential moral values, a sense of spirituality for its survival. Material progress and power can never be considered alone to sustain a society. Modern civilization, as described by Gandhi, is a disease, a seven or nine days wonder which takes into consideration neither morality nor religion. Today’s civilization with its spiritual and moral hollowness is in dire need for change lest the lust for wealth and power ultimately lead to the destruction of the total human civilization. History has provided us with innumerable examples, in Iraq, Afghanistan, Kashmir, South Africa and other parts of the world to state a few; where violence has totally failed to establish peace and give a sense of security. The remedy to come out of this void and destruction, which have threatened the entire existence of man is the technique of non-violence. In today’s world where violence has become the norm, ripping apart the social fabric and security provided by the gregarious collection of individuals, non-
violence as an effective alternative, has again surfaced as a need to meet the tyranny, aggression, injustice and oppression. To meet the challenges of this modern age, we must consider the teachings of great religious and social reformers like Prophet Mohammad (S), Jesus Christ, Buddha and the like who always preached non-violent action and suggested to humanity that peace, goodwill and tolerance can lead it towards the true and right path as ordained by the Supreme Reality. In India, Gandhi advocated non-violence to be cultivated in every sphere of life as well as to get success and development in various departments of human existence, Non-violence to him was an effective mode and the way of life.

There seems to be some substance in arguing that violence can be reduced if non-violence is given a prominent place in acute conflicts. But in order to persuade that non-violence is a viable alternative to violence a concrete perspective needs to be developed. In short a philosophy of politics of non-violent action can be said to be itself a political requirement of the day. The political philosophy of non-violent action or what amounts to the same thing, a philosophical analysis of the politics of non-violent action therefore needs to be sketched in order to bring out the full implications of such political strategies. The implications need to be fully explicated and the discourse articulated. Non-violence is to be assessed as a view to be preferred or prescribed, an ethical principle capable of providing an alternative to violence in order to achieve political ends.

Violence is, correctly or incorrectly, presumed to be identifiable source of suppression and as such paves way towards hegemony or hegemonic structures of power. The philosophical tendency would be then obviously monistic in nature. Non-violent action is assumed proponent of
pluralistic power base that is fragile for the interaction and sharing in it of various groups of the society. Non-violent action produces appropriate mechanisms of change that shift the power basis. It brings about political jiu-jitsu.

The purpose of this thesis is to isolate for philosophical study the use of non-violent action for social and political change. The politics of non-violent action has been discussed with its basic features and elements. It tries to show the effect of non-violent action in its ideological fragments to establish a better social order preferred by its adherents. The thesis discusses the political philosophy, and paradigms of liberty, power, democracy and sovereignty in terms of politics of non-violent action. Therefore, the project is divided into Six Chapters that are (i) Non-Violence, (ii) Democracy, (iii) Sovereignty, (iv) Gandhian Politics of Non-Violent action apart from a starting (v) Introduction and (vi) Concluding Remarks.

The second chapter of this thesis deals with non-violence wherein I have tried to justify the superiority of non-violent action over violent action. Giving reasonable points, I have established the fact that human society, to achieve peace and prosperity in the real sense of the word, needs non-violence in every walk of life especially politics. The idea of non-violence has been explored giving its elaborate historical background. Under this section, concept of non-violence in Indian Thought, in Islamic world, in Chinese thought and further in the West have been discussed. Giving references from Holy Scriptures of Hindus likely, the Vedas, the Upanishad, the Ramayana, the Bhagvada Gita, the Mahabharata; other religions like Jainism and Buddhism; rulers like Asoka, I have tried to convince that non-violence has been an integral aspect of Indian culture and one that finds an
important place in Holy Scriptures. Non-violence finds a vital place in the ideologies and principles of the great Indian leaders like Rajendra Prasad, Rabindranath Tagore, Raja Ram Mohan Roy and others. Through their reasoning and logical statements they have supported non-violent action very strongly.

The Islamic concept of non-violence falls under the headings of the Qur’an, life and teachings of Prophet Mohammad(S), Imam Ali, ideologies of Muslim thinkers and rulers and Sufism. Islam gives paramount importance to non-violence. Peace and tolerance have been often advocated in its teachings. The life of Prophet Mohammad (S), Imam Ali, Imam Hasan and Hussain best exemplify the use of non-violent action. Innumerable Muslim philosophers, leaders and rulers ranging from Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Mohammad Iqbal, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, Akbar to Dara Shikoh have preached the principles of non-violence and have shown its great significance when applied in political life. Sufism or Islamic mysticism with its teachings of love, compassion and brotherhood propagates the same.

The Chinese notion of non-violence includes the teachings of some great philosophers like Confucius and Loa Tse the founders of Confucianism and Taoism. They expounded and preached non-violence through their doctrines of Altruism and Non-Assertiveness respectively. The Western notion of non-violence in this discussion consists of the teaching of Christianity, its Holy Scriptures and some great Western philosophers like Thoreau, Ruskin and Tolstoy. This historical analysis of non-violence aims to project the fruitfulness of non-violent action in the course of history.

In this chapter on non-violent action, a careful examination of its methods is indeed needed. The methods of non-violent action include protest
and persuasion, non-cooperation and non-intervention which are all designed to overcome the opponent in a non-violent way to bring in positive changes. Strategy of non-violent action holds a key place. This strategy includes timing, initiative and indirect approaches towards adversary’s power. All these topics are dealt upon in a systematic manner to show how the technique of non-violent action can be best used in practical situations to achieve desired results.

The idea of non-violent action is closely bound up with the concept of Democracy and Sovereignty, which are also the two important concepts of political philosophy. Democracy and non-violence are indeed like the two sides of the same coin which are inseparable and inseverable from one another. True Democracy can be achieved only through the method of non-violent action. Gandhi very aptly pronounced this, “True democracy or the Swaraj of the masses can never come through untruthful and violent means….”

In the third chapter, Democracy as an important political concept, one that is closely related to non-violence, has been discussed. Democracy in the simplest words, of Abraham Lincoln, is the government of the people, by the people and for the people. It is a rule by will of the majority of the citizens. To arrive at a proper concept of democracy, the rise and growth of this political concept in both the West and the East, has been discussed. Its gradual development in the West from the time of Homer to the present concept of liberal democracy has been traced. In West, the concept of democracy found opposition in writings of Plato and Aristotle. The concept of mixed democracy that is a combination of aristocracy and democracy emerged with support of philosophers like Aristotle, Polybius and others.
With time came Hobbes, Rousseau and Locke’s social contract theory which advocated for the consent of the people to be important in any form of rule. This laid the foundation of modern democratic states. In the eighteenth century with American and French revolutions democracy got a written form and by twentieth century the notion of democracy in West got fully evolved.

The Eastern development of Democratic concept needs attention on its evolution in the Islamic World and in India. Democracy and its compatibility with Islam has been a topic of debate for quite a long time. The Islamic philosophers have discussed the concept of democracy against the backdrop of Islamic laws. Some feel that the concept of Tawhid, an important concept of Islam goes against majority rule but others consider that Tawhid needs a democratic system because all people are equal in front of God and therefore, democracy supports this notion of equality. Thus, among Islamic philosophers a wide range of opinions exists with some denouncing this Western notion while others advocating for its adaptation for progress among Muslims nations. This difference in perspective among the Islamic scholars owes to the different conditions of their times, of the way they interpret Islam and understand its essence.

In India, the concept of democracy did exist in the remote past in the concept of sabha, samiti etc., though it was in a nascent state. With coming of different dynasties which were basically monarchial in its functioning, the notion of democracy got curbed. It once again gained grounds with the coming of East Indian Company in India in 1612. India now a colonized nation began to be influenced by Western philosophers and thinkers and finally with its independence India became a democratic nation. The Indian concept of democracy further consists of the discussions on the different
dimensions of democracy given by various Indian scholars. This includes
divine democracy of Bipin Chandra Pal, spiritual democracy of Gandhi,
organized democracy of M.N. Roy and notions of democracy as held by
Maulana Azad and Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan.

Democracy in words of Radha Krishnan is not only a political system
but a way of life. This makes us to deal democracy both as a form of
government and as a way of social life. Democracy as we know is a political
concept with its origin in the West but with time it expanded its horizon and
began to include certain social, economic and ethical values. The concept of
liberty, equality and fraternity are some of the intrinsic values of this
democratic faith. All the three concepts need to be completely knit together
to achieve true democracy. Democracy, as a form of government, needs
certain important conditions for its success. Under this section, I have
discussed unity, brotherhood, solidarity, liberty, freedom, tolerance, sense of
public responsibility, education etc. which are inevitability needed for its
success.

The fourth chapter is based on Sovereignty, which is integrally bound
up with the fundamental concepts of modern politics. Sovereignty is an
important aspect of the State which implies supreme power over its citizens.
Sovereignty, being a concept of political philosophy, has been discussed in
detail as to what the concept really means. The features, attributes and
distinctions like De jure and De facto of sovereignty have been discussed.
Like other political terms, sovereignty has evolved from time of Aristotle,
Romans through Middle Ages to modern time. Before the Medieval Age,
political organization was more based on religious order but with the Peace
of Westphalia the State got its legal authority. The concept of Sovereignty as
an unlimited, supreme an absolute power of the state spread from the West to the East through colonization. With American and French revolutions popular Sovereignty emerged which is closely related to the notion of democracy. In discussing the development of this political concept a careful examination of various theories of Sovereignty needs attention. The different theories of Sovereignty which have been discussed includes monistic theory, pluralistic theory, popular sovereignty, sovereignty of reason, theory of Auto-limitation and views of philosophers like Grotuis, Bentham and others. This section of my discussion gives both the legal view of Sovereignty as found in writings of Hobbes and Bentham and philosophical views as expressed by Rousseau and other thinkers.

From discussing the development of the above Western notion, the concept of Sovereignty as found in the Islamic world has been further explored. Islam believes in the sovereignty of God and this authority is channelised through the agency of man. These delegates need to follow Islamic laws and certain important responsibilities. The concept of Sovereignty in Islamic world incorporates a number of important values which the Western concept is devoid of.

After tracing the course of development of Sovereignty, this chapter concludes with an important discussion on the changes and evolution of the concept according to the present scenario. Sovereignty, in this Postmodern Age is viewed differently owing to several factors such as globalization, international relation, and humanitarian interventions and so on. This chapter ends with an important discussion on the concept of ‘Politics of Sovereignty’ giving in detail the wide ranging views.
The Fifth Chapter, ‘Gandhian Politics of Non-Violent Action’ discusses the contributions of Gandhi in making non-violence a social and political technique. It clarifies the concept of Satyagraha, given by Gandhi in detail. All that Gandhi achieved was through the politics of non-violent action for which is till date widely celebrated across the globe.

Gandhi saw in the politics of non-violent action the struggle of the individual against the all-powerful state. Gandhi, the apostle of non-violence, brought about the political change of attaining freedom for Indians by achieving sovereignty for India. This was achieved through a strategy of popular non-violent ambience, such as ‘Non-Cooperation movement in 1920’, to protest against the Rowlett Act and the 1919 massacre of innocent people in the Jalianwalla Bagh, the Dandi March to break the Salt Law that Salt Satyagraha of 1930, the subsequent individual Satyagraha’ and the ultimate ‘Quit India Movement of 1942’ etc. In fact, the apostle of peace and tolerance, was true to non-violence to the extent of calling off the highly successful and popular Non-Cooperation Movement after violence broke out in Chauri Chaura. Gandhi would say that bravery is not arming oneself, for that implies an element of fear. For him non-violence is an élán vital that has nothing to do with physical strength.

He objected highly to violence and maintained, “The method of violence cannot do good in the long run. Witness the effect of the armed rising of the Allied Powers against Germany. Have they not become even like the Germans, as the latter have been depicted to us by them?”¹ He further adds, “I do not believe in armed risings. They are a remedy worse than the disease sought to be cured.”² In other words, Gandhi considered that

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no problem in this world can be sorted out through violence or suppression because violence always creates counter violence which amounts to the loss of life and life-resources. Thus, he emphasized the need of non-violent action to achieve desired result in every walk of life of human beings.

The Last Chapter of this thesis consists of Concluding Remarks based mainly on the three above mentioned chapters. In this section, the outcome and conclusions on which I have arrived at have been articulated and discussed. I do hope that my research project will pave the way towards better political order and stability, which seem essential for the general betterment of world citizens at large. It is non-violence, which overcomes violence and devilish attitudes and practices and finally solves the critical problems with deep love and care for humanity. All the great religious leaders and their followers teach and preach non-violence to make human society a better, nobler, gentler and more beautiful society. There values such as love, caring, non-violence, peace and justice need to be followed by contemporary global society for its’ share survival.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES


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